

WEST WICKHAM COMMONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 22 January 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the West Wickham Commons Consultative Committee held at the Metropolitan Police Sports Club, The Warren, Croydon Road, Bromley, BR2 7AL at 7.00pm

Present

Members:

Sylvia Moys (In the Chair)
Barbara Newman
Barbara Baker (Heartsease Girl Guide Camp)
Gladys Edmonds Wickham Common Residents' Association)
Cllr Nicholas Bennett JP (West Wickham Ward, London Borough of Bromley)
Avril Glover (Bromley Bridleways Access Group)

Keith Harris (West Wickham Residents' Association)
Bridget Hogan (West Wickham and Spring Park Volunteer's Group)
John Matthews (West Wickham Residents' Association)
Geoff Newton (West Wickham Police Community Advisory Panel)
Cllr Neil Reddin (London Borough of Bromley (Hayes & Coney Hall Ward)
Sam Wheatcroft (Wickham Common Residents' Association)

Officers:

Alistair MacLellan	- Town Clerk's Department
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons
Paul Ritchie	- Head Ranger
Barry Gutteridge	- Senior Ranger
Luke Barley	- Ranger

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Alderman Gordon Haines, Deputy Stanley Ginsburg and Deputy Catherine McGuinness.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the public minutes and summary of the meeting held on 12 June 2013 be agreed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

Hartfield Crescent

The Head Ranger noted the issue of damage to the verge caused by recent works carried out by contractors from Thames Water. He confirmed that the

City of London Corporation had the matter in hand and discussions had taken place with representatives of the contractors. It had been agreed that they will extend the kerb stones from the Croydon Road toward Hartfield Crescent, remove any tarmac on the common side, landscape the area with soil and replace the damaged wooden posts.

Draft Terms of Reference – Committee Membership

The Head Ranger welcomed Barbara Baker and Geoff Newton to their first meeting of the Committee and circulated a draft list of stakeholder groups. He asked those present to feedback any comments on the list to him after the meeting so that these could inform officers' recommendations to Members regarding other potential stakeholders in the management of West Wickham Common & Spring Park.

Volunteer Improvement Group

The Head Ranger noted this was addressed as part of Item 7 of the current Agenda.

Heritage Lottery Fund Bid

The Head Ranger updated members regarding the successful bid and the recruitment of a Project Development Officer Machel Bogues, who will be working from the Merlewood Estate Office in Caterham from Monday 3 February 2014. He would be working to develop a project to conserve and interpret the important historical features at Kenley Common associated with the WW2 Battle of Britain airfield and to prepare a grant application for the next stage of the grant process.

Management Priorities - Transport for London (TfL) Survey

The Head Ranger noted that there had been no further news regarding TfLs survey of road use at the location of a proposed pedestrian crossing A232 Croydon Road and therefore Councillor Phil Redmond had agreed to enquire with TfL directly to establish the level of progress. The Head Ranger concluded by emphasising that this was a project led by TfL and the Highways Authority and therefore the City of London was only able to actively monitor progress and respond to any impact upon its open space.

4. WEST WICKHAM COMMONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chairman introduced the draft Terms of Reference and noted that 1(f) would be amended to read '*The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee, together with **up to three** other members appointed by the Committee*'.

RESOLVED –

That the draft Terms of Reference of the West Wickham Commons Consultative Committee be approved, subject the amendment noted by the Chairman.

5. **INTRODUCTION TO STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

The Chairman introduced the item by noting the structural changes to senior management team within the City of London's Open Spaces Department had been prompted by the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath accepting the position of Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons from the end of February 2014. The Superintendent of City Commons had therefore been appointed interim Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, with the City Commons now being assigned to the Superintendent of Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common, who was present at the meeting this evening.

The Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons took the opportunity to introduce himself to the Committee. He noted that he had been Superintendent of Burnham Beeches since 2001 and had a background in business administration and countryside management. He added that he was passionate about and interested in promoting sustainability. He concluded by noting that Burnham Beeches was a relatively small site so by taking responsibility for the City Commons he was taking on a big challenge.

He went on to outline the staff restructure across the City Commons, noting that this process had begun under his predecessor in 2011. The restructure had been subject to an informal consultation process to establish what improvements could be made to how the teams were organised. The new team structure was now fixed and work was underway to populate the different posts. He added that, given the City Commons were charities their management processes were similar to those that he was already familiar with at Burnham Beeches.

The Chairman commented that it would be useful for the Committee to be informed – by email or post - as soon as the new team structure was fully established rather than wait until the informal summer meeting.

A member commented that the Epping Forest & Commons Committee had been extremely pleased for both the new Superintendent of Hampstead Heath and for the Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons when their new roles had been announced, and that she hoped the West Wickham Commons Consultative Committee would be equally supportive of them.

In response to a question from a member of the Committee, the Superintendent replied that the team restructuring had taken place in a bid to improve organisational efficiency rather than due to financial pressures.

In response to a request from a member of the Committee the Town Clerk agreed to circulate a brief explanation of how the different Open Spaces Committees were structured and organised.

In response to a question from a member of the Committee, the Head Ranger replied that the organisational changes would not have an effect on service levels, in that team processes, contact numbers etc. would all remain the same.

A member of the Committee commented that she felt that the new team structures would work well once they had been fully implemented.

6. **SUMMARY REPORT OF THE VISITOR SURVEY 2012**

The Head Ranger introduced a Summary Report of the Visitor Survey 2012, noting that the survey had been commissioned to better understand visitor numbers and patterns of use. He expressed thanks to the volunteers who had helped to carry out the survey. He commented that overall the survey had been a useful, interesting and informative exercise. For example, it demonstrated that whilst Spring Park was one of the smallest sites, it was the busiest. Therefore future budgeting would take account of this. He concluded by noting that the next step was to assess the quality of the data that had been collected.

In response to a question from a member he confirmed that the apparent absence of disabled users of West Wickham Common and Spring Park would be addressed as part of the team's forward planning.

In response to a comment by a member, the Head Ranger agreed to liaise with the London Borough of Bromley regarding the possible extension of the footpath in Spring Park to make disabled access easier.

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7. **VOLUNTEER IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2013**

The Committee considered a report on the Volunteer Improvement Plan 2013. The Head Ranger noted that the Committee had been informed of the City of London's intention to draw up such a plan and the current report was the outcome of this. The Chairman concluded by noting that it was apparent that there was a considerable involvement of volunteers in the management of West Wickham Common and Spring Park.

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8. **KEY PROJECTS AND ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14**

The Head Ranger introduced a presentation to the Committee on Key Projects and the Annual Work Plan 2013/14. He noted that Key Projects were those that were submitted for inclusion in the Departmental Business Plan, and included themes such as rangering, visitor experience, marketing and condition assessments.

He went on to explain in brief what the themes that underpinned the City Commons management priorities for 2013/14:

Visitor Experience

- Ensuring West Wickham Common and Spring Park meet Green Flag Award standards by carrying out internal pre-inspections with a City Commons colleague who was a recognised Green Flag inspector.

Marketing

- The use of the City of London website and Open Spaces webpages to promote initiatives such as the Small Leaved Lime Project, and the inclusion of material within the West Wickham Residents' Association newsletter.

Condition Assessments

- Facilitating inspections by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and responding to Environmental Stewardship Scheme issues arising from inspections that were subsequently reported to Natural England. The Head Ranger noted that the misunderstanding by the RPA Inspectors over whether conservation grazing was a requirement at West Wickham Common had been resolved between the City of London and Natural England.
- Inspecting and monitoring tree stock to identify tree disease, which was particularly pertinent given Oak Processionary Moth had been detected at a nearby site.

Consultation

- The establishment of, and ongoing engagement with, the West Wickham Commons Consultative Committee.

Education, Recreation and Events

- The Head Ranger noted that a policy covering these areas of activity was currently being developed by the Director of Open Spaces.

Furthermore the work of the staff at West Wickham and Spring Park had been informed throughout by commitment to organisational standards, namely:

Sustainability

- The use of Aspen chainsaw fuel, horse logging, and the use of fuel efficient vehicles.

Finance

- Efficiency savings achieved in part through the successful application for a £8,000 SITA grant for the Small Leaved Lime Project.

Health and Safety

- Carrying out fire safety audits across West Wickham and Spring Park.

Internal Communications

- The use of e-news to save on the amount of paper used by staff at West Wickham and Spring Park.

In response to a question from a member regarding recommendations made by the Green Flag judges, the Head Ranger replied that Spring Park had been marked down over issues with byelaw enforcement, dated signage, and hazardous pathways. The Head Ranger noted however that the judging panel

was composed of urban park managers which affected their attitude towards Spring Park & West Wickham, which was rural common land. For example, whilst they described the pathways as hazardous, this was due to exposed tree roots that were arguably a common feature on rural common land. Their critique of West Wickham Common included the limited representation of different community groups among users of the Common. The Head Ranger noted however that the Visitor Survey 2012 demonstrated that the demographics of the persons using the Common reflected those of the local communities around all the City Commons.

The Senior Ranger then provided the Committee with an update on some activities that had been undertaken during 2013:

- **Small-leaved Lime Project**

Local volunteers had begun the project by clearing vegetation (mainly Sweet Chestnut trees) around the Small-Leaved Limes in order to increase light levels. This clearance generated timber that was moved using horses from a Dorking-based company. The time taken to clear the timber using horse-power was broadly equivalent in terms of time and finance compared to the use of machinery. The use of horses was covered by a SITA grant which, if forthcoming in 2014, would see the work-horses return in October. The Senior Ranger concluded by noting that members of the public had tended to avoid the areas of the common in which the horses had been employed and therefore if the horses did return in October 2014 it would be worth exploring advertising the project more widely and inviting members of the public to go and witness the horses in action.

- **Spring Park Coppicing**

The Senior Ranger noted that the coppicing project had now gone through a full cycle and was entering its second decade, with chestnut trees being coppiced the previous week.

- **West Wickham and Spring Park Volunteers (WWaSPs) Away Day**

The Senior Ranger had organised a WWaSPs Away Day to the Petts Wood and Hawkwood National Trust site as a way of expressing thanks for the hard work and commitment of the WWaSPs throughout the year. Both staff and volunteers had noted the similar management practices undertaken at Petts Wood.

9. **MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES & ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15**

The Chairman introduced a report on Management Priorities and the Annual Work Programme for 2014/15, noting that it was a comprehensive report.

The Head Ranger added that the report format followed that adopted in previous years, and that key priorities for West Wickham Common and Spring Park remained oak pollarding, restoration and maintenance of heathland, monitoring the A232 pedestrian crossing and the monitoring of boundaries to

ensure the site was protected, people kept safe and the landscape responsibly managed.

He added that the Annual Work Programme 2014 included further Small-leaved Lime project work near the site office; chestnut and hazel coppicing; the maintenance of sloe berry bushes given these were an important habitat; oak surveys and the maintenance of the wildflower meadow.

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

West Wickham and Spring Park Volunteers (WWaSPs)

In response to concerns expressed by a member of the Committee regarding the ageing demographic among existing WWaSPs, the Head Ranger agreed to consider this issue as part of the Volunteer Improvement Programme.

West Wickham Ranger's Lodge

In response to a question, the Head Ranger confirmed there were no plans by the City of London to put West Wickham Ranger's lodge up for sale and that it remained for the use of City of London Corporation staff.

St Jude's Storm Damage

In response to a question regarding storm damage, the Senior Ranger confirmed that Spring Park had lost a couple of trees due to storm damage, but most of the impact had been apparent through the high amount of small branch debris.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business.

12. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Committee agreed that the proposed date of the summer visit could be set via email following the meeting, with the one caveat being that officers avoid scheduling it in early June 2014.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

Chairman

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