

COULSDON COMMONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 14 January 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Coulsdon Commons Consultative Committee held at the Merlewood Estate Office, Caterham, CR3 5LN at 7.00 pm

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)	Malcolm Jennings (Association of Croydon Conservation Societies)
Sylvia Moys	Graham Lomas (Friends of Farthing Downs)
Verderer Peter Adams	Phil Rathbone (Croydon Conservation Volunteers)
Rachel Adams (Croydon Conservation Volunteers)	Councillor Celia Rudland (Whyteleafe Village Council)
Councillor Liz Bonsall (Chaldon Village Council)	Avril Sleeman (British Horse Society)
Richard Carter (South London Harriers)	Councillor Hilary Turner (Tandridge District Council & Kenley Airfield Friends' Group)
Alan Clifford (Old Coulsdon Residents' Association)	

Officers:

David Arnold	Town Clerk's Department
Andy Barnard	Superintendent, Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common & City Commons
Allan Cameron	Head Ranger for Coulsdon Common
Andrew Thwaites	Head Ranger for Ashtead Common
Steve Wise	Senior Ranger
Steve Bruce	Ranger
Luke Ellis	Ranger
Sean O'Kelly	Ranger
David Wraith	Ranger

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from George Abrahams (Deputy Chairman), Barbara Newman, Gwyneth Fookes (Bourne Society), Dr Jane McLauchlin (Croydon Natural & Scientific Society), Councillor Stephen O'Connell (London Borough of Croydon), and Councillor Chris Wright (London Borough of Croydon & Friends of Farthing Downs).

The Chairman welcomed those present to the meeting, particularly the new members Councillor Liz Bonsall (Chaldon Village Council) and Councillor Celia Rudland (Whyteleafe Village Council), and thanked everyone for attending.

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

There were no declarations.

3. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED: That the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 12 February 2014 be agreed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

The Chairman thanked Sylvia Moys for kindly standing in as Chairman at the last meeting.

Committee membership

The Head Ranger of Coulsdon Commons advised members that four local Parish councils were contacted with a view to nominate a representative to the Committee. Whyteleafe and Chaldon Village Councils each nominated a representative but Netherne and Caterham Valley Village Councils declined the offer.

Introduction to Structural Changes

The Superintendent of Stoke Common, Burnham Beeches and City Commons advised that a document detailing the updated team structure would be circulated to all members of the Committee.

4. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee received the approved Terms of Reference for the Coulsdon Commons Consultative Committee.

Graham Lomas noted that the Committee lacked youth representation from local schools, Parent Teacher Associations or School Councils, as stated in section 1(h) of the Terms of Reference. However, Silvia Moys pointed out that the Committee has a good informal relationship with Riddlesdown Collegiate, at which she is a Governor and Councillor Liz Bonsall was previously Deputy Head Teacher.

Councillor Celia Rudland added that she was a current teacher at Whyteleafe School and was aware of local students using Kenley Common regularly. Members noted that the Commons were also used by many local schools for the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

RESOLVED – That the approved Terms of Reference for the Coulsdon Commons Consultative Committee be noted.

5. **UPDATE ON STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

The Committee received a verbal report of the Superintendent regarding structural changes within the Open Spaces Department. He explained that Coulsdon Commons were the responsibility of the Burnham Beeches, Stoke and City Commons division within the City of London Corporation Open Spaces Directorate. He advised that he had been appointed as Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke and City Commons on a permanent basis in December 2014 and there had been a reduction of one Head Ranger post within the division to create a Support Services Manager post, which was currently being recruited.

The Chairman congratulated the Superintendent on his permanent appointment and thanked him for the excellent work carried out by his team so far.

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6. SERVICE BASED REVIEW

The Committee received a verbal report of the Superintendent regarding the Service Based Review. Members were informed that the Open Spaces Department was required to make savings of £2.189 million by 2017/18, which represented a 14% budget reduction. The Superintendent advised that £1.175 million of savings would be met through core areas such as third party provision of sports facilities and a review of the Department's facilities; £541,000 would be met through operational efficiencies such as improved vehicle fleet management; and £473,000 would be met through increased income generation by increasing car park charges, adding new charges and letting out surplus properties on the Commons. Members were assured that core activities such as nature conservation and recreation would continue to be delivered to a high standard whilst savings were delivered.

The Chairman added that the Superintendent had an excellent track record of being economical and imaginary with limited funds available from his experience at Epping Forest. He thanked members of the Consultative Committee in advance for their support required during the financial challenge ahead.

Members noted that the Director of Open Spaces had given a helpful talk to the Friends of Farthing Downs regarding additional sources of income available for Coulsdon Commons.

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7. EPPING FOREST LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The Committee received a verbal report of the Superintendent regarding changes to legislation governing the City of London Corporation's Open Spaces. He explained that each open space within the directorate was governed by specific Acts of Parliament from the 1870s, so decisions relating to spending had to be reflected in those Acts. Amendments had to be agreed by Parliament via Various Powers Acts, which had been used in the past for specific changes. He advised that there was now a need to amend and update the Acts more generally to incorporate the motor car, increasing financial challenges, population increase, and anti-social behaviour.

The Superintendent added that the following issues could be addressed with a Various Powers Act amendment:-

- Surplus vacant accommodation on the Commons could be let to domestic or commercial private tenants instead of remaining vacant or being demolished;
- Business and Commercial contracts could be no longer limited to three year periods;

- Fines that were limited to specific amounts across the Open Spaces Directorate could be increased in line with the national scale of fines to better act as a deterrent against anti-social behaviour;
- Troublesome members of the public could not be ejected from the site under the current legislation so new powers would enable staff to do this and to temporarily exclude the public from small areas to encourage income from the film industry;
- Damage to verges caused by vehicles and commuter parking could be addressed via a legal framework within the Acts.

In response to a member's question, the Superintendent advised that Metropolitan Police were used to help exclude the public from certain parts of the open spaces but it was often a long and difficult process due to a lack of resources available to the Police.

Members were advised that a Private Members' Bill would be presented to Parliament in November 2015 and that their feedback in relation to the above issues at Coulsdon Commons would be welcome during the consultation process up to 15 April 2015 via the City Commons email address.

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8. KENLEY REVIVAL PROJECT

The Committee received a verbal update regarding the Kenley Revival Project from the Head Ranger for Ashted Common. The Head Ranger advised that the main objectives for the revival project were to preserve its physical features, collate an archive of relevant documents, and to involve a wider range of people in the heritage of the airfield.

He advised that round one funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) had been secured in 2014, which allowed a bid to be developed for round two. Project work could start if and when round two funding was secured. Members were advised that the bid would be submitted in June 2015.

The Activity Plan for the project would target young people and online users through outreach talks and guided walks, resource packs for local schools, and an e-learning festival. The conservation aspect of the project would involve identifying certain areas of the airfield for high level conservation and restoration to make the airfield more legible.

In response to a member's question, the Head Ranger advised that an event would be taking place at the airfield on or around 18 August 2015 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

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9. REVIEW OF THE 2014/15 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a verbal update from the Head Ranger of Coulsdon Commons that reviewed the 2014/15 annual work programme.

The Head Ranger advised that improving tree safety had been one of the focuses during 2014/15 as he and his staff had a legal responsibility to keep the site safe for users. As a result, of the revised departmental Tree Risk policy it had been necessary to train staff to a national standard and four rangers were now accredited National Tree Rangers. The accredited Rangers had inspected low risk trees during autumn 2014 whilst inspections on high risk trees were carried out by contractors. Inspections revealed that a fungus (*Meripilus giganteus*) had infected the root system of some trees in the car park at Riddlesdown but no warning was available until the fungus became visible above ground. Affected trees had been reduced in height for safety. Rangers were hopeful that the trees would survive but if not would provide a valuable standing deadwood habitat.

The Head Ranger advised that the Higher level stewardship programme was coming into its fifth year out of ten. Contractors had carried out works to reclaim chalk grassland on Kenley Common and staff had carried out hay-making to maintain the Common as a species-rich habitat. Members were also advised of a wider project of in-house habitat management which had involved the transfer of wood chip from cut areas of scrub to repair bridleways to a high standard.

The Head Ranger advised that 1.5 kilometres of fencing had been replaced as well as audit carried out of all boundary fences during autumn 2014. This was part of a five year project to improve all boundary fencing at the Commons.

The Committee were also advised of the following works and activities had taken place during 2014/15:-

- The breeding cattle herd returned to the Commons after winter accommodation at Epping Forest;
- Ragwort pulling in Farthing Downs had been carried by the New Hill Billies and two corporate volunteer groups;
- Staff had worked with local supermarkets during the Farm to Form campaign, which helped raised young people's awareness of where their food came from;
- 300 bags of charcoal had been produced and would be sold to generate some income;
- A film crew from Sport England had paid a total of £2,600 to use parts of the Common for filming on three occasions;
- The population of 75 sheep at the Commons would not be increased in 2015 through the breeding programme, which was on hold for operational and financial reasons
- Four Green Flags and two Green Heritage Awards were awarded to the Commons in 2014 and applications were now underway for the 2015 awards.

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10. MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES & ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The Committee received a verbal update by the Senior Ranger of Coulsdon Commons regarding the management priorities and Annual Work Programme for 2015/16. Members were advised that priorities would be similar to those in

2014/15 as they would be completing work started in 2014. Some priorities would include:-

- to carry out A22 grassland restoration at Riddlesdown Common;
- vegetation management would be carried out around the important historic features at Kenley Common;
- boundary and stock fencing across the Commons would be reviewed and audited;
- blocks of retained scrub would be managed on Farthing Downs and succession restored on New Hill;
- sheep and cattle would continue to graze the four Coulsdon Commons;
- staff and volunteers would be clearing secondary woodland at Kenley Common to restore it to grassland and conserve its World War Two heritage features.

In response to a member's question, the Senior Ranger advised that spurge laurel still remained in open areas of the Commons. Rangers would neither encourage nor discourage its growth to determine how it developed. The Senior Ranger added that it needs areas of woodland to survive but it was currently growing in areas needed for chalk grassland.

The Committee thanked all staff for their hard work in preparing and implementing the Work Programme and for the excellent use of volunteer groups.

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11. **FRIENDS' GROUPS UPDATES**

Graham Lomas provided an update on the work of the Friends of Farthing Downs:-

- The 2015 Programme for the Friends of Farthing Downs was being developed through meetings and walks and a quiz night was to be held soon to fundraise;
- There was a good attendance at their Annual General Meeting and the lecture provided by the Director of Open Spaces;
- They were hoping to implement a system of QR codes at Farthing Downs and Happy Valley to help the public navigate the sites;
- Additional volunteers would be installing flowers and shrubs on the platform of Coulsdon South train station, as well as promoting Farthing Downs to members of the public;
- Four large photos of the Downs should soon be installed in the ticket hall at Coulsdon South station, once talks with the Senior Management Team at Southern Rail had been completed;
- A new booklet to promote and recruit new members to the Friends of Farthing Downs would soon be available;
- A London Green Belt map had been published with contributions from the Friends of Farthing Downs, which was the first of its kind and included significant detail such as constituency, borough, and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest boundaries.

The Committee thanked Graham Lomas for his update and the Chairman recommended that the London Green Belt map be viewed by everyone.

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12. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

There were no questions.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the summer visit was provisionally scheduled for 27 June 2015. The Town Clerk would circulate the final details to members once these had been agreed.

Please note that subsequent to the meeting, a new provisional date of Wednesday 24 June 2015 was suggested by the Superintendent and Head Ranger.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Chairman

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