

WEST WICKHAM COMMONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 20 January 2015

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

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)	Bridget Hogan (West Wickham and Spring Park Volunteers' Group)
Barbara Baker (Heartsease Girl Guide Camp)	Cllr Neil Reddin (London Borough of Bromley)
Sylvia Moys	Sue Short (Heartsease Girl Guide Camp)
Gladys Edmonds (Wickham Common Residents' Association)	Sam Wheatcroft (Wickham Common Residents' Association)
Keith Harris (West Wickham Residents' Association)	

Officers:

Philippa Sewell	Town Clerk's Department
Andy Barnard	Superintendent, Burnham Beeches, Stoke & City Commons
Allan Cameron	Head Ranger
Barry Gutteridge	Senior Ranger
Richard Van Neste	Information Ranger

In Attendance:

Vicky Hughes (public)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Deputy Chairman George Abrahams, Barbara Newman, Verderer Peter Adams, Cllr Nicholas Bennett, Avril Glover, Cllr Hannah Gray, Geoff Newton, and Cllr Tom Philpott.

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 22 January 2014 be agreed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

Visitor Survey 2012

The Chairman confirmed that officers had liaised with the London Borough of Bromley regarding the possible extension of the footpath in Spring Park.

4. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee noted their terms of reference, and requested that an additional Member be added.

RESOLVED – That the terms of reference be amended to include a representative from the Hayes & Coney Hall Police Community Advisory Panel.

5. **UPDATE ON STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

The Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common and City Commons updated the Committee on the changes made over the last year as a result of the two divisions being merged. Members noted that many adjustments had been made, but more were to needed to address the impact of combining two roles, four separate charities and the geographic spread of sites totalling 2000 acres across three counties. The restructuring of the City Commons team was completed in April 2014, including the permanent appointment of the Superintendent, the reduction of one Head Ranger post and the creation of a Support Services Manager, Livestock Ranger and Information Ranger.

In response to a Member's question regarding communications, the Superintendent advised that, prior to the merge, the two divisions operated very differently and the team were now trying to improve communication processes to work more effectively.

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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 over three years. The Superintendent advised that the savings proposals made for Open Spaces were being considered in three strands: focusing on the core activities (nature conservation and recreation), increasing operational efficiency, and generating income. £1.175 million of savings would be met through the first strand, 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.

In response to Members' questions, officers advised that there were no plans to reduce staff visibility and that charges for wayleaves were likely to be reviewed (currently an annual fee of £5 was levied for West Wickham Common). The Chairman added that the joint efforts of the local team and community would be instrumental in communicating the upcoming changes and reasoning behind them, and thanked members of the Consultative Committee in advance for their support required during this financial challenge.

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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 and amendments had to be agreed by Parliament via Various Powers Acts. This had been used to enact specific changes in the past, but Members noted 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;
- Exclusion of the public from small areas to allow staff to charge for filming to take place;
- 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, officers advised that each Common had different byelaws, which would not be affected by this Act and could only be changed through a separate process.

Members were advised that a summary paper would be circulated to all Consultation Committee Members and that feedback would be welcome during the consultation process up to 15 April 2015. This would shape the Superintendent's report to the City's Court of Common Council, after which (if approved) formal consultation would take place before a Parliamentary paper submitted in November 2015.

The Superintendent will circulate his presentation and a separate paper giving more details, to inform Member's considerations.

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8. PROPOSED CROSSING BY TFL ON THE A232 AT HARTFIELD CRESCENT

The Committee received a verbal report of the Head Ranger regarding the pedestrian crossing proposals from Transport for London (TfL) on the A232 at Hartfield Crescent. He gave a history of proceedings, which dated from 2004, and confirmed that in November 2014 TfL met with City of London Officers to present three options. These were outlined in detail to the Consultative Committee, who discussed the suitability of each. Members noted that the three

options would be presented to the Epping Forest & Commons Committee in March 2015 for approval.

In response to Members' questions, officers confirmed that the approximate area of land-take of each option did not include the reclamation of car park space, as this was deemed to be too expensive and complex to act as mitigation and would not necessarily be advantageous for visitors. Officers also advised that Options 2 and 3 only concerned City of London land, but Option 1 affected land owned by both the London Borough of Bromley and City of London. With regard to highway safety, Members discussed the history of the junction, which had always been a hazard for pedestrians, and discussed the positive impact a crossing would have independently of the option of widening Hartfield Crescent.

The Committee requested that plans for all three options be circulated electronically, and it was agreed that all comments would be fed back to officers by 1 February 2015.

RESOLVED – That:

- (a) Plans for all three options be circulated to Consultative Committee Members electronically; and
- (b) All comments be fed back to officers by 1 February 2015.

9. REVIEW OF THE 2014/15 WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Ranger introduced a presentation to the Committee on the 2014/15 Work Plan:

Tree Inspections

Four rangers had completed a Professional Tree Inspector course to bring tree safety inspections in house.

Oak Processionary Moth surveys

Owing to a rise in moth population in nearby areas, the Forestry Commission would be carrying out a winter survey on the Common, the results of which would be circulated in March/April.

Heathland restoration on West Wickham Common

This was a key project which was progressing well thanks to help from volunteers.

Infrastructure

Six-monthly reviews of infrastructure continued, with green woodworking skills used for improvements.

Signage

Hedges around the car park had been lowered, new signage put up, and the car park was being closed after dark; Members noted that this would be more welcoming for visitors as well as deterring anti-social behaviour.

WWaSP

A decade of the WWaSP volunteering had been celebrated this year; the Chairman expressed his thanks to all those involved.

Small-Leaved Lime Project

Year two of the project had been completed; 35 tonnes of lumber had cleared by heavy horses, and the area had re-established and restored itself quickly.

Community Engagement

Education and promotion had been increased, including visits from Wickham Common Primary School and talks to the local community; additional talks had been booked for spring/summer as these had been well attended and well received.

Green Flags

A decade of flying Green Flags had been celebrated this year; the Chairman expressed his thanks to all the volunteers and officers that helped achieve this.

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10. MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES & ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The Senior Ranger introduced a report on Management Priorities and the Annual Work Programme for 2015/16, noting that the key priorities for West Wickham Common and Spring Park were:

- The final year of the Small-Leaved Lime project;
- Heathland Restoration;
- Heritage Conservation – both the proposal to apply for West Wickham Common to become a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and the Green Heritage Award application;
- Monitoring the A232 pedestrian crossing; and
- The coppicing at Spring Park.

A Member queried the late circulation of newsletters and notification of events, and officers advised that the recently appointed Information Ranger would be overseeing community engagement to ensure any delays in communication were avoided.

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

There were no questions.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED – That dates be circulated electronically to confirm the date of the summer visit.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm

Chairman

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