

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 26 January 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Tuesday, 26 January 2016 at
11.00 am

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)
Deputy John Barker
Deputy Stanley Ginsburg
Alderman Sir Paul Judge
Deputy Catherine McGuinness
Sylvia Moys
Barbara Newman
Virginia Rounding
Philip Woodhouse
Verderer Peter Adams
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Verderer Richard Morris
Verderer Dr. Joanna Thomas
Alderman Ian Luder (Ex-Officio Member)

Officers:

Natasha Dogra	- Town Clerk's Department
Paul Double	- Remembrancer, City of London
Nigel Lefton	- Remembrancer's Department
Sue Ireland	- Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	- Superintendent, Epping Forest
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent, City Commons
Gerry Kiefer	- Business Support Manager, Open Spaces
Martin Newnham	- Head Keeper, Epping Forest
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Head of Visitor Services, Epping Forest
Jo Hurst	- Business Manager, Epping Forest
Paul Monaghan	- Department of Built Environment
Roger Adams	- City Surveyor's Department
Alexander Nell	- City Surveyor's Department
Susanna Lascelles	- Public Relations Office

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Graeme Smith.

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

Deputy Catherine McGuinness declared a non-pecuniary interest in the Epping Forest Centenary Trust.

3. **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN**

Following the resignation of George Abrahams and in accordance with Standing Order 30, Members of the Committee were invited to appoint a Deputy Chairman for the remainder of this municipal year. The Committee were reminded that whilst the Verderers were full Members of the Committee for Epping Forest business it was convention for this position to be filled by a Member of the Court of Common Council.

Resolved - Mr Philip Woodhouse, being the only Member to express an interest in serving, was duly appointed as Deputy Chairman for the remainder of the year. The Committee thanked the outgoing Deputy Chairman, Mr Abrahams, for his work with the Committee.

4. **MINUTES**

Resolved – that the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising:

Epping Forest District Council Green Belt Review Stage 1 update

The Superintendent of Epping Forest informed Members that his Officers had met with Epping Forest District Council Planning Officers to discuss Stage 2 of the Green Belt Review which should complete in March 2016.. In response to a query regarding media coverage of the sale of Forest Land, the Superintendent informed Members that local press coverage was monitored very carefully and the coverage may refer to the recent sale of Epping Forest College land. Members noted that Epping Forest was inalienable under the Epping Forest Acts and could not be sold.,

The Committee agreed that it was imperative to engage with social media and local press regarding contentious issues or topics of public interest.

The Warren Conservatory

The Superintendent of Epping Forest informed Members that replacement woodwork for The Warren Conservatory had been machined but installation works on had been delayed by bad weather and strong winds. The work would restart again shortly.

5. **TO REVIEW THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk outlining the Terms of Reference for the Committee. Members' attention was drawn to the one proposed amendment to the Committee's Terms of Reference. This arose from the review of the Corporation's grant-giving activities, which the Committee had considered in July 2015. The Committee agreed to set up a joint Open Spaces Grants Review Working Party to determine how to best allocate open spaces grants.

Members noted that the Working Party agreed that the most suitable approach would be for the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee to take

responsibility for awarding open spaces grants, with the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, West Ham Park Committee or Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee providing comments and recommendations on any grant requests relating to their areas.

Resolved – that the amended Terms of Reference be agreed with the amendment to item (d) “to express views or make recommendations to the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee for that Committee’s allocation of grants which have relation to Epping Forest and Commons”.

6. SCHEDULE OF VISITS 2016

Members received the schedule of visits for 2016. The Superintendent informed Members that following the success of last year’s Dinner, it had been agreed to hold a further Committee dinner in June or July this year in honour of the retiring Chairman. Committee Members would be updated regarding arrangements for guests closer to the event.

Resolved – that the following dates be agreed:

- 5th March Committee visit to Epping Forest
- 30th April Committee visit to Spring Park and West Wickham
- 7th May Committee visit to Epping Forest
- 8th June Lord Mayor’s Visit to Dorneywood
- 9th July Committee visit to Burnham Beeches
- 10th September Committee visit to Epping Forest
- 19th November Committee visit to Epping Forest

7. 2015/16 BUSINESS PLAN QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE UPDATE - QUARTER 3 (APRIL TO DECEMBER 2015)

The Committee received a report of the Director of Open Spaces which summarised the Open Spaces departmental performance against the 2015/16 – 17/18 business plan.

The reported was corrected to read that 15 Green Flags and 12 Green Heritage Awards had been received by the City. Members noted that one departmental programme was reporting as amber – the Lodges Review Programme. All other programmes were green.

Resolved – that the item be received.

8. SEEKING DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO RESPOND TO A PLANNING CONSULTATION

Members considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces seeking approval for delegated authority to respond to a Public Consultation document published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which was proposing changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Committee noted that the Consultation document contained six proposals to simplify the provision of new homes, with two of particular potential impact on the Green Belt. The proposals suggested increases to residential densities for new developments close to areas defined as ‘transport hubs’ and also the

proposed weakening of 'openness' considerations when developing brownfield sites within the Green Belt. The Committee did not wish to encourage car parking pressures on the area by an increased number of commuters from the area and asked that this comment be reflected in the response to the consultation.

Officers were encouraged to respond to the consultation emphasising the importance of protecting Open Spaces which might potentially be affected by these changes, highlighting the primary importance of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation status.

Resolved – that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman and Director of Open Spaces, to provide a suitable response to the Consultation.

9. SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

The Committee received an update from the Superintendent of Epping Forest summarising the division's key activities from October to December 2015. Of particular note was:

- an improvement in dissolved oxygen levels in major Forest water bodies;
- a positive "duty of care" prosecution on fly tipping;
- the annual closure of the Forest to open riding;
- reduced water levels in the Wanstead Pond cascade due to dam repairs and containment of Floating Pennywort; and
- a major incident which saw a ruptured water main under Fairmead Road create a "geyser" effect on 2nd January that was flooded sections of the Forest and damaged a significant stretch of public highway.

The Superintendent also presented the Committee with a petition entitled "Keep Epping Forest Free of Charge for the People". The petition originated from the change.org website through a campaign coordinated by the Epping Forest Forum which had received 14,924 signatures to date and raised concerns regarding both charges for Forest access and public consultation regarding proposed changes.

Members enquired whether a monetary value could be placed on the number of hours volunteers worked. Officers confirmed this was possible though the comparisons can be controversial... Members also noted that the cost of pumping 290,000m³ of water into the Heronry Pond, where the water had reduced to a very low level, would cost between £4,000 and £5,000.

In response to a query regarding development applications on arbitration land Members noted that Officers always sought to discuss applications with developers prior to submission ideally through pre-consultation arrangements, though sometimes the first notice Officers will receive of a landowner's intentions is a planning application. Officers now had access to a range of Queens Counsel's advice on the subject to draw upon. Officers advised that while car parks could be considered as 'Previously Developed Land' under current planning law, the arbitration covenants were silent on the use of land for car parking. Members noted that the Forest Land adjacent to the Knollys

Nursery site is the subject of a Highway dedication and therefore the Highway Authority will be able to grant access without reference to the Conservators.

Resolved – that the update be received.

10. EPPING FOREST LICENCE AND PRODUCE CHARGES

The Committee received an update on the charges levied for the management of various Forest licences and produce sales at Epping Forest.

The licencing of activity (excluding filming and photography) on Forest Land and sales of produce raised a total of £58,060 so far in the 2015/16 financial year. Horse Riding Licences raised £15,408, the licencing of regulatory activity realised £34,112, while produce sales generated £8,540. In line with the Service Based Review targets for increased income between 2015/16 – 2017/18, it was proposed that charges for licences in 2016/17 be raised by a figure of 10% with the exception of both Horse Riding Licence Fee and Produce charges.

Members noted that a series of checks on licence discs were carried out last year to ensure horse riders had the appropriate licenses; Officers would be undertaking enhanced checks this year backed by full licence information.

Resolved – that

- the proposed charges for 2016/17 and
- the addition of cancellation terms to the Superintendent's discretionary powers be approved.

11. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION FOR THE VIEW

The Chairman welcomed Officers and a Volunteer Mentor to the meeting. Members of the Committee noted that Epping Forest had owned, preserved and displayed historic objects and documents relating to the Forest for over one hundred years. There were reputational, promotional, financial and legal benefits to be derived from management of these objects as a formal museum collection in line with an externally accredited framework, Museum Accreditation, administered by Arts Council England.

Members noted that there was no direct cost for applying for accreditation. The deadline for submission to Arts Council England was 26 May 2016. An Accreditation award covered three years after which the organisation was invited, but not obliged, to submit a return application. Members were of the view that the forward plan should be reviewed regularly at local meetings together with an annual report regarding progress against targets. The Director agreed that Members should receive this information and that it would form part of the business plan submitted to the Committee for their consideration.

Members noted that Officers were working with the Museum of London and City Corporation departments to share their experiences with accreditation.

Resolved – that Members approved the Statements, Plans and Policies.

12. **EPPING FOREST 4TH GRAZING MONITORING AUDIT REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Superintendent advising that Cattle grazing had taken place across the Forest and Buffer Lands over the year with an average number of animals in the two herds of 162. The extensive grazing area of Fairmead was not grazed adequately due to problems with the invisible fencing initially and some cattle management issues with the grazier latterly.

Resolved – that:

- the observations of this 4th Grazing Assessment be noted; and
- the commissioning of a shorter 5th report by the Independent Assessor for 2016 focussing on the Fairmead extensive grazing area be approved.

13. **WANSTEAD PARK - YOUR HERITAGE APPLICATION BY FRIENDS OF WANSTEAD PARKLANDS**

This report was removed from the agenda by the Superintendent of Epping Forest, with approval from the Chairman.

14. **HIGHAMS PARK LAKE RESERVOIR NOTICE OF ENFORCEMENT ***

The Committee were informed that Highams Park Lake was one of five Large Raised Reservoirs at Epping Forest that were subject to regular statutory inspections by a suitably qualified and approved Engineer. Following an inspection in January 2011, a Section 10 notice was served on the City of London to complete dam strengthening works at Highams Park within three years.

Members noted that a project valued at £1.85 million to undertake the necessary safety works in accordance with the Reservoirs Act was completed successfully on 24 March 2015, following a 14 month extension to the Section 10 notice by the Environment Agency.

In response to a query regarding health and safety Members noted that the planning of any works would take a considerable amount of time. Draining the reservoir as a precautionary measure against section 10 notices would be counter-productive causing structural damage to the dam itself as the clay dries out; increasing the risks of failure if there was a flood. Officers reassured Members that as with previous reports a full Emergency Plan for Highams Park Lake had been agreed with the London Borough of Waltham Forest Civil Contingencies team. Officers informed Members that, rather than producing a dedicated annual reservoir safety report as requested, the results of the inspections would be included in the Director's Risk Report updates to the Committee. Members noted the significant financial implications if the Wanstead Park cascade were to be reclassified as Category A Large Raised Reservoirs.

Resolved – that the update be received.

15. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Committee received a general update on issues across the nine sites within 'The Commons' division.

The Superintendent informed the Committee that the campaign to recruit a Kenley Revival Project Manager had been unsuccessful and the post had since been re-advertised. This delay had affected the project's start date but the elements that needed to be progressed as an immediate priority were being addressed. These included the recruitment of the Learning and Volunteer Officer and a specialist Conservation Consultant. The target completion date for the project as a whole remained unaltered.

Resolved – that the update be received.

16. **MINUTES OF THE BURNHAM BEECHES CONSULTATION GROUP**
Resolved - that the minutes of the Burnham Beeches Consultation Group Meeting be received.

17. **PROPOSED INCREASE TO CAR PARK CHARGES - BURNHAM BEECHES**
The Committee received a report of the Superintendent of The Commons concerning Car Park Charges at weekends and Bank Holidays, which had been introduced at Burnham Beeches in August 2011. The charge had remained at £2 per day since that date.

As part of its Service Based Review commitment the Division was required to achieve an additional £20,000 income per annum from the car park at Burnham Beeches, commencing April 2016. Benchmarking had been carried out and various options considered by the Burnham Beeches Consultation Group (BBCG). The delivery timetable was three months and to that end the two most feasible options and associated views of the BBCG had been presented to Members for consideration.

Resolved – that:

- Option 1 i.e. to raise the weekend and Bank Holiday car park charge from £2.00 to £3.00 per day commencing April 1st 2016 be approved; and
- it be noted that further research would be carried out to facilitate future increases in parking charges should they become necessary.

18. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

19. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**
There was no urgent business.

20. **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 Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

21. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**
Resolved – that the non-public minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as

an accurate record.

22. THE WARREN HOUSE

The Committee received a report of the Director of Open Spaces.

23. REVIEW OF LICENCE AT JUBILEE RETREAT ESTATE YARD

The Committee received a report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

24. LEASE OF HIGHAMS PARK LAKE BOATHOUSE

The Committee received a report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

25. LICENCE FOR TEMPORARY ACCESS

The Committee received a report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

26. CHINGFORD GOLF COURSE UPDATE

The Committee received a report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

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

There were no questions.

28. 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 1.10 pm

Chairman

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