

COULSDON COMMONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 13 January 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Coulsdon Commons Consultative Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 7.00 pm

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)	Graham Lomas (Friends of Farthing Downs)
Sylvia Moys	Sarah Lovatt (New Hillbillies)
Barbara Newman	Dr Jane McLaughlin (Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society)
Verderer Peter Adams	Phil Rathbone (Coulsdon & Kenley Volunteer Group)
Councillor Adele Brand (Chaldon Village Council)	Councillor Celia Rudland (Whyteleafe Village Council)
Richard Carter (South London Harriers)	Avril Sleeman (British Horse Society)
Alan Clifford (Old Coulsdon Residents' Association)	Councillor Hilary Turner (Tandridge District Council & Friends of Kenley Airfield)
Gwyneth Fookes (Bourne Society)	Councillor Chris Wright (London Borough of Croydon)
Brian Hudson (Open Spaces Society)	
Malcolm Jennings (Association of Croydon Conservation Societies)	

Officers:

David Arnold	- Town Clerk's Department
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent, The Commons
Hadyn Robson	- Support Services Manager, The Commons
Allan Cameron	- Head Ranger, West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons
Steve Wise	- Senior Ranger, West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons
Maria Traynor	- Support Services Officer, West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons

1. APOLOGIES

Barbara Newman took the Chair at the start of the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Rachel Adams (Croydon Conservation Volunteers) and Councillor Stephen O'Connell (London Borough of Croydon).

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 of the meeting held on 14 January 2015 be agreed as an accurate record.

4. **THE COMMONS DIVISIONAL PLAN 2015-18**

At this point, Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman) arrived to take the Chair.

The Committee received a report of the Superintendent of The Commons, accompanied by a presentation that outlined The Commons' Divisional Plan 2015-18. Members were advised that the new Plan had been produced by the Senior Management Team, which included the Superintendent, Head Rangers, Conservation Officer, and Support Services Manager. The Plan would be updated at three year intervals. The Superintendent added that the collective name for the Division had recently changed 'The Commons' for communication purposes to help provide a unified identity across all commons. Members noted that the names of the individual Commons, i.e. Coulsdon or West Wickham, would continue to be used locally at each site.

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5. **OPEN SPACES BILL**

The Committee received a verbal update and presentation from the Superintendent of The Commons regarding the City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Bill. Members were advised that the Bill had been deposited to Parliament in November 2015 and it would be considered in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The Superintendent advised that, to his knowledge, the Bill had received one petition since it was deposited but this was not regarding The Commons Division. He added his thanks to Consultative Committee members for the helpful and constructive feedback received during the consultation process in 2015.

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6. **SERVICE BASED REVIEW**

The Committee received a verbal update and presentation from the Superintendent of The Commons regarding the financial savings to be delivered as part of the City Corporation's Service Based Review. Members were advised that £162,000 worth of savings per annum were currently anticipated to be delivered by the Division by 31 March 2018 through increased operational efficiencies and income generation.

Projects to deliver savings across the Division included a reduction in the use of consultants to save £17,000 per annum, the rationalisation of the vehicle fleet, machinery and equipment to save £15,000 per annum, and increased income generation through voluntary donations, wayleave charges, and the letting of office premises and increase or introduction of car park charges where possible. Members noted their concern for the introduction of charges in small car parks such as the one at Riddlesdown Common, as car users may simply

park on surrounding roads instead, which would disturb and disrupt local residents.

Members noted that some income was already being generated through the increased sale of charcoal. A member also added that small grants were available from local District and Parish Councils that could fund specific projects.

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7. PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND SITE VISITS

The Committee considered a report of the Superintendent of The Commons that examined the impact of the re-merger of the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons Consultative Committees upon the frequency and nature of consultative meetings/site visits and seeks to reduce demand on the Members and Officers involved whilst ensuring that effective governance and community engagement is maintained. The Superintendent advised that the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultation Group had agreed to reduce the frequency of its meetings as per the recommendations in the report.

Members noted that a re-merger of the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons was a useful suggestion due to their proximity and the similarities between both sites. Evening site visits in spring or summer would remain useful to enable members to familiarise themselves with both sites. The Superintendent added that informal Special Meetings could take place amongst available members at relative short notice to discuss certain issues.

RESOLVED – That the re-merger of the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons Consultative Committee be supported, subject to a review two years after the re-merger.

8. MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

The Committee received a presentation from the Head Ranger of West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons regarding the upcoming management issues and priorities for Coulsdon Commons. Members received updates regarding the following matters:-

Volunteering

Volunteers had contributed 697 days' worth of man-hours towards conservation work during 2015, including three corporate volunteer days. Volunteers had also helped to prepare and then sell charcoal, which had generated approximately £1,700 worth of income in 2015. Such income would not have been generated if the work had been carried out by Rangers instead of volunteers.

Meet the Ranger Events

An event to promote the work carried out by Rangers was scheduled for February. The frequency of these types of events would look to be increased to

engage further with the local community and develop local users' knowledge about who owns, manages and funds the site.

Awards

Kenley Common and Farthing Downs had both earned Green Heritage Awards and Green Flags had been awarded to all sites across the Commons. An application had been submitted for Riddlesdown Common to be considered for the 2016 Green Heritage Award.

Environmental Stewardship Scheme

The Scheme was currently in its sixth year and was due to end in 2021. The footpath network and general access around the sites had been improved through a programme of scrub clearance. Clearance had also been carried out in areas surrounding The Grove junction. Cattle had recently moved into the cleared area.

Incidents

44 incidents had occurred on the Commons during 2015, including 2 car accidents. A site meeting regarding the blocked water drain on Stites Hill had taken place on 17 December 2015. A programme of work to address the issue had now been created by Surrey County Council and Thames Water. Details of the works to be carried out could be reported to the Committee during February 2016 once they had been agreed. In response to a member's question, the Head Ranger advised that the overflow did not represent a health hazard so the Environment Agency had instructed the local authorities (London Borough of Croydon and Surrey County Council) to deal with the issue.

The Head Ranger reported several incidents of fly-tipping on roads through and surrounding the Commons during 2015 but thanked the London Borough of Croydon for their quick response times. In response to members' requests, he added that figures regarding the level of fly-tipping being carried out could be calculated and provided at a later date.

Kenley Revival Project

The Project had received Heritage Lottery Funding to be delivered within the next three years with a budget of £1.1 million. Two Project Officers were currently being recruited to carry the project forward.

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9. REVIEW OF ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16 AND PRESENTATION OF THE 2016/17 PROGRAMME

The Committee received a presentation from the Head Ranger that previewed the upcoming 2016/17 Annual Work Programme. Members noted the following matters:-

Farthing Downs

Fence replacement, boundary work, and work to reduce the amount of mature scrub in the Site of Special Scientific Interest would be carried out.

Coulsdon Common

Thinning of understory vegetation, fence replacement for animal containment, and work in Rydons Wood would be carried out.

Kenley Common

Coppicing, replacement of the old fence at Stumps Lane, and work to secure and protect the boundary edge would be carried out.

In response to a member's question, the Superintendent advised that he would contact the Friends of Kenley Airfield to enquire whether there were any plans to hold an event to celebrate the anniversary of Kenley Common's 'aircraft acceptance park' status. He added that he was currently unaware of any plans for a Kenley Airshow during 2016.

Riddlesdown Common

Removal of Birch from the quarry, scrub work, and tree safety work would be carried out. In response to a Member's question, the Head Ranger advised that access to the quarry site could be arranged for members through him.

In response to members' questions regarding the sale of logs and wood chippings, the Head Ranger advised that it was a possibility but the work and delivery costs would have to be considered.

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

In response to members' questions regarding Tandridge District Council's Local Plan Review, the Superintendent explained that there were many other similar Local Plan Reviews currently active across the Division, most with extremely short response periods. The Superintendent added that he was not sufficiently resourced to provide full comments to each consultation. Members expressed some concerns that the plan for developments on the green belt and in the towns surrounding the Common would increase footfall, including dog-walkers.

The Superintendent reassured members that the City Corporation would maintain a positive relationship with the surrounding local authorities and deal with Local Plan issues as resources allowed. He added that the Director of Open Spaces was co-ordinating a strategic response to the Government's latest greenbelt proposals and would continue to influence at this level and as required. A member representing the London Borough of Croydon added that he had responded to the initial consultation on behalf of the local Croydon Councillors.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

Members noted that photos and a leaflet about Farthing Downs were now being displayed in the ticket hall of Coulsdon South Train Station, with the largest picture measuring 18 x 4 ft. The Chairman added his thanks the Friends of Farthing Downs for organising the display.

The Chairman also took this opportunity to thank all Committee Members for their hard work and support during his term as Chairman, which was due to expire in April 2016. Members thanked the Chairman for his contribution to the Committee and Coulsdon Commons during his term.

12. **DATE OF SUMMER WALK**

RESOLVED – That the date of the summer visit be circulated by the Town Clerk once it had been agreed by the Chairman, Superintendent, and Head Ranger.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Chairman

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