

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE

Monday, 7 March 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 7 March 2016 at
11.00 am

Present

Members:

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

Officers:

Sue Ireland	- Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	- Superintendent, Epping Forest
Alison Elam	- Group Accountant, Chamberlain's Department
Natasha Dogra	- Town Clerk's Department
Nigel Lefton	- Remembrancer's Department
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent, the Commons
Jeremy Dagley	- Conservation Manager, Open Spaces
Paul Double	- City Remembrancer
Jo Hurst	- Business Manager, Epping Forest
Hadyn Robson	- Support Services Manager
Geoff Sinclair	- Head of Operations, Epping Forest

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Alderman Ian Luder.

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. **MINUTES**

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

Matters arising:

The Warren Conservatory

The Superintendent of Epping Forest informed Members that replacement woodwork for The Warren Conservatory had been machined.. Additional funding for further work had been secured with the City Surveyor and Officers would aim to complete these works before the end of this financial year.

Delegated Authority: Planning Consultation

Members were informed that a response to a Public Consultation document published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which was proposing changes to the National Planning Policy Framework had been agreed by the Chairman and Deputy Chairman.

4. **MINUTES OF THE ASHTEAD COMMONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING ***

Resolved – that the minutes be received.

5. **MINUTES OF THE COULSDON COMMONS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING ***

Resolved – that the minutes be received.

6. **MINUTES OF THE WEST WICKHAM COMMONS COMMITTEE MEETING ***

The Chairman thanked all members for their attendance at local consultative committee meetings and said he was grateful to Barbara Newman for chairing the West Wickham Commons Committee meeting.

Resolved – that the minutes be received.

7. **INCOME GENERATION - REPORT OF A CROSS-CUTTING SERVICE BASED REVIEW**

The Committee were informed that a cross-cutting review of the potential for the City Corporation to exploit new sources of income was commissioned as part of the Service Based Review programme. The review was undertaken from April - September 2015, with a final report cleared by the Chief Officers Summit Group in January 2016.

Members noted that the review found that there were:

- ☐ Opportunities to increase certain fees and charges to bring income into greater alignment with costs, in line with the approach taken in London local authorities;
- ☐ Opportunities to drive increased income from a more entrepreneurial approach in certain areas;
- ☐ Limited scope to increase revenues from public sector grants
- ☐ Potential opportunities to unlock increased corporate sponsorship and private giving to the benefit of the City's cultural and artistic institutions by taking a more co-ordinated approach.

Discussions ensued regarding the use of the City's open spaces for filming. Members agreed that any costs for wear and tear must be covered by the production company. The Committee also agreed that large areas of the open spaces should not be restricted from public access for long periods of time. The Superintendent mentioned the need to be mindful of the nature conservation sensitivities of the sites in relation to income generation potential and the need for balance.

Resolved – that the Epping Forest and Commons Committee endorsed the recommendation “to adopt a proactive approach to marketing the Corporation’s filming locations ensuring consistent coverage of professional film location handling services across the Corporation’s entire land and property portfolio”), noting the specific reference to the opportunity to in relation to Burnham Beeches.

8. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Superintendent of the Commons provided Members with an update regarding work and activity taking place on the Commons. The Committee noted that sadly the Grade 2 listed building (Officers Mess) was destroyed by fire on Thursday 28th February. Arson was suspected but had not been confirmed, as the police were continuing with their investigations. Members queried whether the land would now be developed; however, the site was already subject to planning applications and it sat within a Conservation Area that Croydon County Council were anxious to protect. Officers agreed to update Members once they had further information.

The Chairman said that planning issues would be a more prominent feature of updates to the Committee in future, due to the demand for local authorities to provide more housing. There was pressure on South Bucks District Council, Slough Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to provide further housing and this may impact the area around Burnham Beeches. The Superintendent would keep the Committee updated via his regular updates at meetings.

Members also noted that the Kenley Revival project was progressing well, with a Project Manager, Conservation Consultant and Learning and Volunteers Officers having been appointed.

In respect of the proposed pedestrian crossing on the A232, Members were informed that Transport for London was not yet in a position to submit their report to this committee. A contractor has been appointed to manage the project and there were on-going discussions regarding the specification of materials. Thames Water would now need to be involved as the work required them to relocate a district meter and pressure reduction valves in order for the works to proceed.

Resolved – that the update be received.

9. **PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND VISITS EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS COMMITTEE SITE VISITS**

The Committee was informed that the merger of the City Commons with Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common to form 'The Commons' had united the management of four Consultative Committees under a single Superintendent. Each Consultative Committee was aligned to one of the four charities within the new division.

Members noted the impact of the merger upon the frequency and nature of Consultative Committee meetings and site visits to reduce their demands on the Members and Officers involved whilst ensuring that effective governance and community engagement is maintained.

The Burnham Beeches, Coulsdon Commons, and West Wickham Common Consultative Committees had been consulted and are supportive of the recommendations. Members were satisfied that adequate consultation had taken place and agreed that additional site visits could be arranged should the need arise. Members noted the proposal to visit one rather than two of the open spaces within the Division each year. Members agreed that the work of the consultative committees was integral and must continue to be well supported.

Resolved – that Members:

- i. Approved the re-merger of the West Wickham and Spring Park Consultative Committee (WW&SP) with the Coulsdon Commons Consultative Committee (CC) with the proviso that a further meeting or site visit may be arranged each year should circumstances require.
- ii. Approved a reduction in the frequency of meetings of the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultation Group (BBCG) from three to two per annum with the proviso that a further meeting or site visit may be arranged each year should circumstances require.
- iii. Noted the Town Clerk's role to administer the BBCG thereby bringing it in line with all other Consultative Committees within the Division.
- iv. Approved the reduction of Epping Forest and Commons Committee site visits to 'The Commons' from two to one per annum with the proviso that further meetings or site visits may be arranged each year should circumstances require.
- v. Noted the need for a further report to this Committee in March 2018 to assess the impact of the approved changes.

10. **SPORTS AND MISCELLANEOUS CHARGES FOR THE COMMONS**

The Committee received the report reviewing the charges for sports facilities and miscellaneous items that were provided by The Commons Division and agreed to grant approval for the proposed charges for 2016-17.

Resolved – that Members approved the proposed charges for 2016-17.

The Commons Management Priorities 2016

The Committee received a report regarding The Commons Management Priorities 2016 and agreed to defer this item to allow Members to give due

consideration to the report. The Town Clerk agreed to circulate the report as part of the May Committee meeting agenda.

11. SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

The Committee received an update from the Superintendent of Epping Forest regarding work and activity taking place in the Forest. The Committee was informed that January and February 2016 saw 1026.5 and 967.5 volunteer hours recorded across the Forest.

Members were informed that the figures for the rough sleepers for the first two months in 2016 were 17, compared to 4 for a similar period in 2015, an increase of over 400%, challenging the progressive falls recorded in 2015. The increased numbers possibly reflected the unusually mild temperatures; increases in homelessness recorded by London's homeless link and increases in rough sleeper identification through the novel use of Thermal Imaging Devices.

Members noted that a total of 23 licences were issued during the two months being reported, which yielded an income of £2,496.50 plus VAT. 27 licences were issued during the same period in 2015 - income 2015 of £5,701 which was down on last year. This may be due to the weather and ground conditions. Last year was busy with filming but enquiries are much reduced, including student filming.

In response to a query regarding the deer herd, Members noted that at the last count there were 395 deer in the Forest. 162 vehicle collisions with deer had been reported during the last year and this remained a significant issue for the Forest. Deer which had been killed were handled by the Local Animal Collision Scheme at no cost to the Forest. Officers informed Members that due to the high number of collisions it would be beneficial to increase the number of deer culled going forward.

In response to a query regarding Epping Long Green, Members noted that the removal of industrial building, loose box and hard-standing had taken place; redevelopment of previously developed land would now provide four residential dwellings. Members noted that this conflicted with Green Belt policies and access to the site was across Forest Land.

Resolved – that the update be received.

12. PROPOSED EPPING FOREST CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The Committee received a report of the Remembrance which set out a proposal for the establishment of an Epping Forest consultative committee, on the lines of the current consultative committees for Hampstead Heath and the various Commons. Members noted that the committee would provide an additional mechanism for consulting local interests about the management of the Forest.

Members noted that an initial proposal had been made in the following terms:

a. The consultative committee would have a wide membership representing

as many local interests as possible.

b. It would be chaired by the Chairman of this Committee.

c. Other members would include the four Verderers, one other member of this Committee, and not less than 16 individuals appointed to represent particular interests.

d. Of the 16 (or such other greater number as the Committee determines), two would represent local interests for the whole Forest, four would represent local interests in the northern Forest parishes and four would represent local interests in the southern Forest parishes.

e. Two members would be appointed to represent environmental or ecological interests.

f. Two members would be appointed to represent recreational or sporting interests.

g. Two members would be appointed to represent heritage or amenity interests.

h. The consultative committee would meet at least three times a year.

In addition, it was noted that members of the committee might serve for a term of 3 years, and that it was intended that meetings of the committee would be in public. It was hoped that it would be possible for there to be an opportunity at the committee's meetings for the public to offer their own comments where appropriate.

Before appointing any member of the consultative committee, consultation would be necessary with people or bodies appearing to represent the relevant interest locally to see which groups should be included; including all groups would be impracticable given that there are some 76 such groups. Members would be able to appoint further members if they wished, and the consultative committee would be able to co-opt external persons on an ad hoc basis to contribute to its discussions if it considered that a given interest was not adequately represented among its membership or in relation to a particular project or initiative.

The Committee agreed that an in-depth consultation with local groups and organisations was required to ensure that all groups were adequately represented on the consultative committee. Members noted that Parish Councils were not intended to be represented on the committee and the Superintendent would investigate ways in which they could be included in the work of the Forest.

Resolved – that Members:

☐ Approved the principle of establishing a consultative committee for Epping Forest.

☐ Agreed the proposals set out in this Report for the constitution and procedure of the consultative committee as a starting point for consultation.

☐ Instructed officers to undertake local consultation and produce proposals, taking into account the views of the local groups, on the arrangements for the consultative committee for this Committee's consideration, with a view to setting up the consultative committee later this year.

13. **GATEWAY 7 OUTCOME REPORT: BRANCHING OUT PROJECT - GRAZING & KEYSTONE TREE STRATEGIES (SEF 12/16)**

In introducing this item Chairman asked it to be noted that this project represented a real landmark in progress in Forest management and that the spectacular results had been very apparent at the Saturday Committee visit. The Committee then noted that there were eight success criteria of which five have been achieved fully and a sixth the growth of a cattle herd (funded separately), was on target. Members noted that the highlight was the successful completion of 15 arborist apprenticeships as part of the 5-year Keystone Tree programme.

Members noted that the total expenditure was £1,020,690 over 5 years, delivered within budget. The monies left over from this theme have been redistributed across other parts of the Branching Out Project, including the gateways.

Resolved – that Members noted the update and agreed to close this part of the Branching Out Project. The outstanding Keystone Tree work was to be completed as part of the legacy programme agreed with HLF and incorporated into the annual work programme. The grazing area expansion and invisible fencing was to be completed as part of the separately-funded Stewardship programme.

14. **EPPING FOREST OPERATIONS PROGRAMME FOR 2016-2017**

Chairman introduced the report by thanking officers for an excellent Committee visit on the previous Saturday at which some of the work programme sites had been viewed and he congratulated the Heads of Conservation and Operations on the progress of this work programme to date. The Committee received an update outlining the conservation, visitor access and risk management projects proposed in the Forest for the year 2016-17. The dominant theme of the 2016/17 work programme was the continuing habitat conservation work including the wood pasture restoration programme for which the rate of work has been increased to ensure we meet the 10-year grant commitment under Natural England's Higher Level Scheme.

The key areas of work in the proposed 2016-17 programme, in addition to the wood-pasture restoration, are based on improving visitor access, continuing to enhance the condition of the established surfaced ride network for all users, continuing the landscape and visitor improvement works at Wanstead and Highams Parks and managing risks - particularly those related to highways woody verge vegetation, fly-tipping, rough sleeping and tree safety.

Members agreed that the work contributed by volunteers in the Forest must be emphasised in the report. The Chairman said a great deal of work was done by volunteers to assist Special Education Needs children and young people volunteering in Epping Forest and this contribution must be noted. Members agreed that by taking part in these activities members of the public were able to improve their social skills whilst enjoying some exercise and this should continue.

Resolved – that Members approved the annual work programme.

15. ORION HARRIERS - PROPOSED CLUBHOUSE AND STAFF WELFARE EXTENSION TO JUBILEE RETREAT.

The Committee noted that the Orion Harriers (the Club) had occupied premises on the Forest since 1906; initially in the former coach house at Rangers Road, Chingford and since 2011, at Jubilee Retreat, Bury Road, Chingford following refurbishment costing £152,750 from grant funding and a contribution of £42,750 from the Club.

Since occupying the Jubilee Retreat, the Club membership had grown from 600 members, and was currently standing at almost 800 members and continues to grow. The Club wished to enlarge the changing rooms to accommodate its increased membership and the hosting of race days. Plans had been proposed that include bigger changing areas, a larger meeting space and additional storage facilities.

Members also noted that the Superintendent was seeking staff welfare facilities for the adjacent Chingford Golf Course. The Club's enlargement requirements provide the City Corporation an opportunity to combine its accommodation needs as a joint development.

Resolved – that Members approved in principle the extension of the changing rooms at Jubilee Retreat which is to include the provision of golf course staff welfare facilities and delegated authority to the City Surveyor in conjunction with the Superintendent to enter into discussions with the Club to progress respective requirements.

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

A question was raised regarding an event hosted by the Forestry Commission regarding Tree Health. The Superintendent said he was not aware that this event was being held in March but agreed to investigate it.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

The Deputy Chairman, Philip Woodhouse, wished to place on record his thanks to the outgoing Chairman, Alderman Gordon Haines, for his constant enthusiasm and support for the work of this Committee. Members agreed that Alderman Haines' contribution had been a huge factor in preserving the success of Epping Forest, Burnham Beeches and all of the Commons. The Committee thanked the Alderman for his hard work and congratulated him on a job well done.

18. 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.

19. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

Resolved – that the non-public minutes be agreed as an accurate record.

20. **EPPING FOREST BUFFER LANDS - ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS REVIEW**

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

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

There were two non-public questions.

22. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

There were two items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm

Chairman

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