

EPHING FOREST CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 24 January 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest Consultative Committee held at the Hope Centre, 201 High Rd, Loughton, IG10 1BB at 7.00 pm

Present

Members:

Deputy Philip Woodhouse - Chairman	Ruth Holmes - London Parks & Gardens Trust
Graeme Smith - Deputy Chairman	Andy Irvine - Bushwood Area Residents Association
Judith Adams - Epping Forest Heritage Trust	Robert Levene - Buckhurst Hill Community Association
Carol Pummell (on behalf of Godfrey Baillon-Bending) - Epping Forest Riders Association	Paul Morris - Epping Forest Forum
Jo Blackman - Friends of Wanstead Parklands	Gordon Turpin - Highams Park Planning Group
Martin Boyle - Theydon Bois & District Rural Preservation Society	Enid Walsh - Open Spaces Society
Jill Carter - Highams Residents Association	Tim Wright - Orion Harriers
Susan Creevy - Loughton Residents Association	Verderer Dr. Joanna Thomas
Matthew Frith - London Wildlife Trust	Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Tim Harris - WREN Wildlife & Conservation Group	Verderer Peter Adams

Officers:

Colin BATTERY	Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	Superintendent, Epping Forest
Jeremy Dagley	Head of Conservation
Jo Hurst	Business Manager, Epping Forest
Alistair MacLellan	Town Clerk's Department
Leanne Murphy	Town Clerk's Department
Carl Locsin	Town Clerk's Department
Geoff Sinclair	Head of Operations, Epping Forest
Jacqueline Eggleston	Head of Visitor Services, Epping Forest
Martin Newnham	Head Forest Keeper, Epping Forest

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

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

Mr Tim Wright declared an interest that the Orion Harriers are a tenant of the City Corporation.

3. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Epping Forest Business Manager updated Members on the Terms of Reference of the Committee. She noted that some items that went before the Epping Forest and Commons Committee were deemed non-public and would therefore not come before this Committee. Members will need to determine some outstanding governance issues including quorum, Member conduct etc. over the coming year. If Members wished to discuss items that were not listed on agendas going forward, they could contact the Town Clerk in advance of the meeting.

A Member referred to the note on the front of the agenda pack regarding the potential audio or video recording of part of the meeting. The Town Clerk advised that this is standard wording to advise that members of the public may record part(s) of a meeting. In these instances, the individual(s) would be encouraged to film only the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and City of London Officers, and not Members or fellow members of the public.

RESOLVED – that Members note the Terms of Reference and the fact that further items such as the quorum, etc, would be agreed by the Committee's fourth meeting.

4. **EPHING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE DRAFT MINUTES**

The Committee noted the Minutes of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held on 20 November 2017 and the draft Minutes of the subsequent meeting held on 15 January 2018 which was circulated by email. It was noted that these Minutes were circulated purely as an example to Committee Members.

5. **EPHING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE AGENDA**

The Committee noted the Agenda of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held on 15 January 2018.

The Chairman stated that the Minutes and Agenda had been provided to Members to establish a precedent that would give Members a flavour of how discussions could develop once issues were submitted to the Epping Forest & Commons Committee for approval. The agenda might also give Members of the Consultative Committee ideas for agendas at future meetings. He encouraged Members of the Consultative Committee to provide any thoughts and ideas for the development of the Consultative Committee going forward.

A Member queried whether Members would be given the opportunity to comment on reports on the agenda prior to meetings going forward. The Chairman emphasised that the role of the Consultative Committee was to act as a sounding board on reports and policies that would then be submitted to the Epping Forest & Commons Committee for approval.

6. **WELCOME PRESENTATION AND SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

Members received a welcome presentation from the Superintendent of Epping Forest and noted his report summarising progress with the work programme at Epping Forest across October and November 2017.

Of particular note was further progress on the passage of the City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Bill; continuing high levels of fly tipping averaging 55% up on the previous year; the completion of the surfacing of the Woodford Green wayleave; continuing Operational works majoring on tree safety and wood pasture restoration, together with a successful series of visitor events and very positive publicity for the 800 year celebration for the Forest Charter through both national media and the Lord Mayor's Show.

A Member required clarification on what was meant by 'cannabis' in the graph regarding the types of fly-tip waste. The Superintendent clarified that this meant horticultural waste from illegal cannabis farms, e.g. spent soil, etc, rather than cannabis itself.

Regarding the reorganisation of the Forest Keeper team, a Member highlighted the role of Forest Keepers and valued work they do educating children that visit the Forest. It was queried how this factored into the planned reorganisation as some Members were keen for this educational role to stay. The Superintendent advised that it was important for the focus on staffing to be centred on key operational areas such as dedicated officers specialising on fly tipping prosecutions to address the increasing issue of fly tipping, which currently costs the City of London £300,000 annually. The Superintendent hoped that arrangements could be developed to see third party providers supporting bushcraft schemes rather than the Forest Keepers. It was agreed that wider discussion would be necessary to take into consideration the challenges of managing regulations versus the value of social engagement.

A Member queried whether the City Corporation was engaging with local councils regarding waste management and the new restrictions on non-household waste at many reception centres and charges on the collection of bulky goods that have recently been introduced. The Superintendent confirmed that the City Corporation did engage with Local Authorities and agreed that the charges were a key driver for increased fly tipping, but also noted the financial constraints that all Local Authorities were operating under.

Members discussed the considerable income generated by local sports teams against the costs associated with the large amount of litter generated after match days. An Officer noted that sports organisers received clear terms and conditions about cleaning up after matches but admitted that it had traditionally been difficult to enforce this as the identity of the perpetrators was not always clear. The Head of Visitor Services advised Members that a new booking structure was being introduced, with effect from 1 March 2018, of teams being signed in and out and pitches checked after each game.

The Superintendent advised that football does not generate income but is subsidised by £120,000 each year, reflecting the level of subsidy provided by most Local Authorities. It was noted that littering associated with informal use from non-league members during the summer months was an ongoing issue and spectators were particularly guilty of causing a high amount of littering which will need to be attributed to the relevant teams. Members agreed to be vigilant of these issues and report wrongdoing recognising that there are a

large number of volunteers that also help clear litter across the Forest. The Chairman praised the work of volunteers and thanked them for the vital role they play.

Members discussed the benefits of formally registering the Forest with the Land Registry. The Superintendent advised that registration was a formal legal protection that publicly identified land held in trust by the City Corporation. This large project had been completed over the last three years leaving only a small number of complex boundary cases remaining. Members were advised that an outturn report on the project would be brought before the Committee in due course.

A member queried when the consultation period would start on deer management. The Superintendent advised that a tender for the review of Deer Policy would be undertaken in the Spring with a public consultation expected in Autumn 2018.

Members raised concerns over the reduced budget of £2.9m, which they felt was not particularly high, and queried how much it had fallen in recent years. The Superintendent advised that City of London funding had fallen by 22.5% since 2010/11. However, Epping Forest had during that time raised additional income from forest activities.

Members were disappointed with the announcement that the lakes in Wanstead Park had recently been classed as High Risk by the Environment Agency. The Superintendent advised that a helpful meeting with the Environment Agency's National Flood Manager had taken place and that a specialist engineer is likely to request an engineering feasibility study on the next inspection scheduled in the Spring. It was noted that the cascades on Hampstead Heath had previously received engineering assessments which had required extensive improvement work to address new risks and that the City Corporation was proud of the sympathetic works they had successfully completed there.

7. EPPING FOREST OPERATIONS PROGRAMME FOR 2018/19

Members received a summary of progress on the Epping Forest Operations Programme for 2018/19. Officers outlined the conservation, visitor access and risk management projects proposed in the Forest for the year 2018/19. It was noted that the biggest part of the project would be the HLS wood-pasture restoration.

A Member queried how skylark conservation was progressing considering the problems being incurred at Wimbledon Common. The Head of Conservation, Landscape & Heritage advised that there had been difficulties maintaining numbers of breeding pairs and he was very grateful for the work of volunteers who were continuing to monitor the local skylark population. It was noted that an in-depth survey was being carried out for the first time since 2015 in an attempt to clarify issues affecting the population.

It was queried whether the City Corporation had been liaising with the relevant Local Authority regarding the key crossing point at Highams Park following the

meeting on site as there were suggestions that the Local Authority had funds to put towards the project but were awaiting feedback from the City Corporation. The Head of Conservation, Landscape & Heritage advised that discussions regarding clearing some of the Forest adjacent to the crossing had taken place and that further discussions would continue.

Members were concerned about the *phytophthora ramorum* disease outbreak which had now been found in Sweet Chestnut in the same location as the original outbreak. The Head of Conservation explained that the further outbreaks were disappointing and he expected further works to remove the remaining infected areas to take place shortly.

A Member noted that there were a number of both short and long-term plans governing the management of the Forest. He felt that Members required clarification of what the long-term plans were in order to understand the full picture. The Superintendent advised that a 30-page Management Plan summary bringing everything together was in final draft and would be coming to Members in the Spring 2018.

It was noted that a set management plan was overdue and Members requested more information on when this was coming and how it would be circulated. The Head of Operations advised that there was a big agenda to address and that the strategy would set out a 30-year timeframe giving an overall sense of direction alongside a three-year plan to deal with urgent matters.

RESOLVED –

- that Members approved the annual work programme as summarised in the main report;
- that coloured versions of any maps would be circulated (or included in agendas) and would be put up on screen at meetings going forward.

8. EPPING FOREST BUFFER LANDS - ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS REVIEW

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Open Spaces regarding the Annual Agricultural Holdings review of the Epping Forest Buffer Lands. Members were advised that buffer lands are a multifunctional and valuable commodity including a number of important features such as tenants, farm businesses (with licenses that are reviewed and renewed), management of grass and grazing herd and an area of importance to wildlife.

The Chairman drew specific attention to the Corporate and Strategic Implications listed within the report (paragraph 29) which meet the City of London Corporate Plan's (2015-19) key policy priorities of:

- maximising the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London's communities;

- increasing the outreach and impact of the City's cultural, heritage and leisure contribution to the life of London and the nation.

9. **EPPING FOREST EVENTS POLICY**

Members considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces regarding the Epping Forest Events Policy and were advised that they were the first Committee to see the policy, which is currently a draft document, and would be going to all the relevant Committees at the City of London Corporation for approval.

The Head of Visitor Services noted that the aim of this work was to add clarity on the rules regarding events at Epping Forest as there currently was no policy in place. It was noted that the public would see a simpler web-based system which Epping Forest are currently trialling. The Chairman requested that members be notified when the final version goes live.

Members queried whether there was a cut-off point on what can be done in the Forest without having to go through the process of advising the City Corporation and paying a fee. An Officer advised there was a cut-off of approximately 50 participants, although this would depend on the activity and its impact on the Forest, the overall aims were to prevent damage to the Forest, manage the local impact on facilities enjoyed by all and to prevent user conflict. It was noted that it was particularly important to notify the City Corporation of vulnerable groups who planned to use the Forest. Members agreed a clear statement of what the benchmark was would be vital and what to do if a potential applicant was unsure.

A Member noted that there were lots of local groups doing activities at Wanstead Park and wondered whether they would need to pay the £25 fee each time. An Officer explained that the fee was to cover the application process, and this would have to be covered in the first instance. If a group had ongoing, regular activities, this would only need to be done once annually and ongoing dialogue with the City Corporation regarding dates, numbers, etc, would suffice. Any group that has a reasonable impact on the Forest and/or other users must engage in dialogue with the City Corporation.

A Verderer disagreed with the distinction between two categories of those applying to host an event separated by not-for-profit and charity as some charities, particularly the larger charities, arguably had a commercial element and would seek to make money from the event. An Officer advised that the costs for charities and not-for-profit would be based on the percentage of income or entrance fee.

A Member noted that in his view the visitor capacities listed for sites in the Forest were too generous. An Officer explained that this was worked out based on an accepted formula of how many people can fit into the space available. Members were encouraged to advise the Town Clerk of any perceived inaccuracies in numbers so these can be revised.

Regarding the concern on the use of drones at events, the Head Forest Keeper advised Members that a draft policy on drones was in progress and would be coming to the Committee for comment.

RESOLVED – That Members support the policy approach outlined in the report and the policies attached as Appendices 1-3.

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

The Chairman encouraged Members and members of the public to advise the Town Clerk of any written questions going forward.

A member of the public recommended that there be a sport representative, in particular someone with a golf connection, to sit on the Committee as there are a number of local and established golf clubs in the area. It was queried whether a person could be co-opted onto the Committee.

Members requested clarification on the process for members of the public to approach the Committee. It was recommended that any queries from the public be submitted to the Town Clerk at least two weeks prior to a meeting to ensure that they receive a substantive answer from the Committee at the meeting. The same was recommended if a Member wanted to suggest an item for the agenda in order to help Officers investigate issues.

Regarding Members that represent a group, it was asked if a substitute could be sent in a Member's place if they are unable to attend a meeting. The Committee agreed this would be acceptable provided that the Town Clerk was advised in advance. The Epping Forest Business Manager noted that this principle would need to be added to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

The Epping Forest Business Manager noted that the Committee currently had three Verderers and that a space was available for a fourth Verderer. Members were advised that the person must be a resident of a Forest Parish and cannot be a member of the City of London Corporation's Court of Common Council. Details were available on the Verderer page of the City Corporation website and the closing date for applications was 5 February 2018 at midday.

The Chairman concluded the meeting and thanked Members on a successful first meeting. Members, in turn, thanked the Chairman and were pleased with the meeting.

12. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Town Clerk undertook to set the date of the next meeting of the Committee outside of the meeting, noting that it would take place at some point in June 2018 at the Hope Centre in Loughton. At the request of the Chairman, the Town Clerk also agreed to set the dates of the next three meetings.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chairman

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