

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE
Monday, 21 November 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 21 November 2016
at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Deputy Stanley Ginsburg
Alderman Sir Paul Judge
Deputy Catherine McGuinness
Sylvia Moys
Barbara Newman
Philip Woodhouse
Verderer Peter Adams
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Verderer Richard Morris
Verderer Dr. Joanna Thomas
Jeremy Simons

Officers:

Natasha Dogra	–	Town Clerk's Department
Susanna Lascelles	–	Town Clerk's Department
Andy Barnard	–	Superintendent, The Commons
Esther Sumner	–	Open Spaces Department
Paul Thomson	–	Superintendent, Epping Forest
Jeremy Dagley	–	Open Spaces Department
Jo Hurst	–	Open Spaces Department
Alison Elam	–	Chamberlain's Department

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from Virginia Rounding and the Director, Sue Ireland.

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

Deputy McGuinness declared an interest in the Epping Forest Centenary Trust.

3. **MINUTES**

Resolved – that the minutes be agreed as an accurate record, subject to the following clarifications.

A Member queried the minutes under the item "request for the dedication of forest land to support Transport for London cycle improvements. The

Committee agreed that the minutes should read that “responsible cycling should be encouraged and carefully managed in the forest”.

A Member queried the minutes under the Superintendent’s update in relation to the Rotary Club’s proposal to plant crocuses on Theydon Green. The Committee agreed that this proposal was neither agreed nor encouraged and amended the minutes to read:

‘In response to a query regarding the Rotary Club’s proposal to plant crocuses on Theydon Green, as part of the ‘End Polio Now’ campaign, Officers noted that although the land was not part of the Site of Special Scientific Interest Members of the Committee were not in favour of this proposal and asked for this decision to be conveyed to both the Parish Council and the charity concerned, proposing use of highways land elsewhere in the village’.

4. SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

The Committee received an update from the Superintendent of Epping Forest informing Members of activities which had taken place in and around the Forest. Of particular note was significant works across the Forest to facilitate the restoration of wood-pasture; the increased costs of grass cutting due to substantial grass growth and a longer cutting period; the award of Museum Accreditation to the View Collection by the Arts Council; and the renewal of the coveted ‘Blue Badge’ Visitor Attraction and Quality Assurance Scheme at Forest visitor facilities. The Superintendent updated his report to recount the successful passage of the Open Spaces Bill through the Opposed Bills Committee on 15th November and the successful reception at Buckingham Palace for the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy which was attended by the Chairman, previous Chairman, Director and Head of Operations.

It was also noted that there had been a 33% decrease to 263 fly tips this year in comparison to the previous year. Some 47% of the tips have occurred in or around Wanstead Flats. Members asked Officers to ensure that telephone numbers for lines which members of the public could call to report fly tipping should be publicised in the Forest Focus magazine.

Verderers asked Officers to ensure that they were invited to events such as unveiling of signs and plaques in and around the forest to which local Councillors were invited. Members agreed that this helped form good local relationships.

In response to a query, the Committee noted that the Garden Centre, Crown Hill application for 21 residential houses was refused on grounds including inappropriate development within the Green Belt. The scale of the proposal would result in the overdevelopment of the site. However, the site had been cleared, and concern was raised that a further application or appeal is expected for development at the site.

Resolved – that the update be received.

5. **EPPING FOREST TRUSTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2016***

The Committee received the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 for Epping Forest.

Resolved – that the report be received.

6. **REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGETS - EPPING FOREST 2016/17 & 2017/18**

The Committee received an update regarding the latest approved revenue budget for 2016/17.

Resolved – The Members:

- Reviewed the provisional 2017/18 revenue budget to ensure that it reflects the Committee's objectives and, if so, approve the budget for submission to the Finance Committee;
- Authorised the Chamberlain, in consultation with the Director of Open Spaces, to revise these budgets to allow for any further implications arising from Corporate Projects, departmental reorganisations and other reviews, and changes to the Additional Works Programme. Any changes over £50,000 would be reported to Committee.
- Agreed that if other Committees request that further proposals are pursued, that the substitution of other suitable proposals for a corresponding amount is delegated to the Town Clerk in discussion with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the relevant Committee. If the substituted saving is not considered to be straight forward in nature, then the Town Clerk shall also consult the Chairman and Deputy Chairmen of the Policy and Resources Committee prior to approving an alternative proposal(s).

7. **DEDICATIONS AND SPONSORSHIP IN EPPING FOREST**

Members noted that the Epping Forest visitor survey conducted between 2010 and 2015 indicated that Epping Forest held many strong and positive associations with peace, tranquillity and happiness resulting from public engagement with the open space. Given these associations a significant number of requests for commemorative items particularly benches and tree plantings were regularly received from the Forest's visitors, usually to reflect a loved one's connection with the Forest.

Officers suggested that a draft policy could offer ways to commemorate people or events over a fixed period in return for structured investments that were in keeping with both the natural aspect of particular places and planting and biosecurity policies, as well as securing an important additional source of income for investment in the Forest.

In response to a query regarding the maintenance costs, Members noted that all schemes provided sufficient income to cover initial capital costs, maintenance, repair and renewal where necessary as a contribution for reinvestment in the Forest of at least 25%.

Members raised concerns about the ability of the City to hold donations in a reserve fund that could exist across financial years to support maintenance and if necessary replacement. The Chairman agreed that it was important for the Chamberlain to identify a suitable solution for this matter, but asked the policy be adopted subject to the agreement of an appropriate mechanism.

The Committee were in agreement that Officers should be instructed to amend the wording of the policy to ensure that it did not read that photographs would be provided to members of public of “their” tree.

Resolved – that Members agreed:

- To approve the policy for Dedications and Sponsorship providing delegated approval for memorial and sponsorship requests in ‘managed areas’ within Epping Forest, subject to revisions regarding the description of individual sponsorships, a satisfactory arrangement for holding in trust the proceeds from donations and a further report on handling legacies.

This position would facilitate the public desire to invest in Epping Forest and will enable the City to access new funding sources for investment in infrastructure and landscaping projects.

- To delegate to the Director of Open |Spaces and the Superintendent of Epping Forest powers to approve requests for dedications and sponsorship in line with the draft Policy for Dedications and Sponsorship and in accordance with any approved charging schedule,

8. **EPPING FOREST 5TH GRAZING MONITORING AUDIT REPORT**

The Committee were informed that cattle grazing took place across the Forest and Buffer Lands this year with an average number of 137 animals during the grazing season. The two main areas encircled with invisible fencing, Fairmead and Chingford Plain, were grazed through the summer until October. Two other Forest sites were also grazed and preparations to introduce cattle at three new sites from 2017 were completed. Warren Wood Slope, however, had to be cut by machinery due to lack of grazing this year.

In response to a query, Members noted that the Independent Grazing report focused on the Fairmead extensive grazing area and the need to ensure that cattle in the Forest could be managed extensively. The key points of the assessment were that the number of cattle remains insufficient for fully effective grazing due to a number of factors but that the range of sites being grazed and ready to receive cattle next year was encouraging. As grazing expands, new monitoring techniques allowing greater coverage would be considered within resource constraints.

In total, during 2016, the cost of monitoring of grazing impacts by all consultants was £3,992, a reduction in expenditure of 64% from 2015, reflecting a significantly reduced monitoring effort in response to budget cuts.

Resolved – that Members:

- noted the observations of the 5th Annual Grazing Report.

- approved the change from an annual reporting cycle to a longer review period to allow the Superintendent to commission further reports from the Independent Assessor as appropriate and that a report be submitted regarding the grazing to the Committee in December 2018.

9. **PROPOSED RESPONSE TO SUDDEN OAK DEATH "RAMORUM" OUTBREAK AT THE WARREN PLANTATION, EPPING FOREST**

The Committee were informed that Sudden Oak Death, *Phytophthora ramorum*, or "Ramorum disease", had been discovered this year at The Warren Plantation following eight years of monitoring at Epping Forest. The most prolific infective host species is larch. Both of these species were present within Epping Forest at The Warren Plantation near the M25.

The disease was found in 3 Rhododendron shrubs at The Warren Plantation and a Statutory Plant Health Notice was issued requiring their immediate removal and the removal of surrounding bushes. This was implemented in early November. Members noted the future concerns about the control of the disease's spread and the main options available to The Conservators. The option for complete removal of the two best-known, non-native infective host species, namely larch and Rhododendron, from all Forest and Buffer Land sites is recommended.

Discussions ensued regarding the suitability of the options considered by the Committee. Some Members were of the view that option 3, the partial removal, high priority sites only be approved. Other Members considered option 4, the complete removal of larch at the Warren Plantation and all other Buffer Land locations was more appropriate given the high risk involved with the disease. Officers stated that they would encourage Members to approve option 4 due to the seriousness of the situation, particularly the risk of the further spread of the existing outbreak or any further reinfection.

Members were in agreement that regular updates should be submitted to the Committee. It was noted that the publicity regarding the outbreak and preventative work would need to be handled very sensitively and Officers from the Communications team would be requested to write a press release regarding the matter. Members agreed that it should be well publicised that the requirements of the current Statutory Plant Health Notice (SPHN) and any subsequent SPHN as served under the Plant Health (Order) England 2015 must be adhered to in all operations by staff and contractors. In addition, any clearance and tree work must receive the required consents and permissions under the other relevant legislation protecting the Special Area of Conservation, Site of Special Scientific Interest, Registered Parks and Gardens and Conservation Areas.

Members thanked all Officers involved for their hard work and dedication, and in particular paid tribute to the vigilance and ability of the Biodiversity Officer.

Resolved – that Members:

- Noted the requirements of the Statutory Plant Health Notice and the subsequent management actions taken;

- Approved the felling and removal of all larch plantings from the Buffer Lands
- Estate with The Warren Plantation trees as top priority within this Financial Year;
- Approved the clearance of Rhododendron from *all* sites across the Forest as soon as practicable, with priority given to those closest to ancient Beech populations.
- Approved option 4 (complete clearance) with some Members stating that they did not agree with this decision.

10. **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN - PUBLIC CONSULTATION UNDER REGULATION 18**

The Committee noted that a 6-week consultation period for the Epping Forest District Local Plan had begun and would be completed by 12th December 2016. Members noted that the housing allocation for the District is for 11,400 houses of which over 2,800 were allocated within Epping and Loughton and up to 3,900 at Harlow. Officers recommended that the Committee delegated its authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy, to make a comprehensive response on behalf of The Conservators to seek the optimum policies and allocations for sustainable development that would best protect the environment and natural aspect of Epping Forest and its Buffer Lands.

Resolved – that Members agreed to delegate authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, to make a response on behalf of The Conservators to the Epping Forest District Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation.

11. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Committee received the report of the Superintendent of the Commons which updated Members on activities in and around Burnham Beeches and the Commons. Of particular note to Members was the Kenley Revival update; Members noted that the Project plan had been revised to make it more manageable and to focus on the outputs of the project. The next set of project themes to go to tender will be Interpretation which is the second largest capital spend. This would encompass the onsite signage and travelling exhibition inclusive of development, design, manufacture and installation. The aim was to tender by mid-November with returns due in January with work commencing in Spring 2017.

Resolved – that the update be received.

12. **ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT**

A written update was provided on the environmental and planning issues facing Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.

Resolved – that the update be received.

13. **BURNHAM BEECHES AND STOKE COMMON TRUSTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2016***

The Committee received the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2016.

Resolved – that the report be received.

14. **ASHTEAD COMMON TRUSTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2016***

The Committee received the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2016.

Resolved – that the report be received.

15. **WEST WICKHAM COMMON AND SPRING PARK WOOD COULSDON AND OTHER COMMONS TRUSTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2016***

The Committee received the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2016.

Resolved – that the report be received.

16. **REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGETS 2016/17 & 2017/18**

The Committee received an update regarding the latest approved revenue budget for 2016/17. Overall the provisional Original budget for 2017/18 totals £2,539M, an increase of £391,000 compared with the latest approved budget for 2016/17. The main reasons for this increase is a £403,000 increase in the City Surveyor's additional works programme off-set by minor variances.

Resolved – that Members:

- Reviewed the provisional 2017/18 revenue budget to ensure that it reflects the Committee's objectives and, if so, approve the budget for submission to the Finance Committee;
- Authorised the Chamberlain, in consultation with the Director of Open Spaces, to revise these budgets to allow for any further implications arising from Corporate Projects, departmental reorganisations and other reviews, and changes to the Additional Works Programme. Any changes over £50,000 would be reported to Committee.
- Agreed that if other Committees request that further proposals are pursued, that the substitution of other suitable proposals for a corresponding amount is delegated to the Town Clerk in discussion with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the relevant Committee. If the substituted saving is not considered to be straight forward in nature, then the Town Clerk shall also consult the Chairman and Deputy Chairmen of the Policy and Resources Committee prior to approving an alternative proposal(s).

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

A Member raised a query regarding the 800th anniversary of the 1217 Forest Charter, following discussions with the Sherwood Forest Trust on the Saturday visit. The Superintendent advised that the City does not possess either the 1217 or 1225 versions of the Charter. A series of Epping Forest events were already planned for 1217 including a campaign to identify more Commoners. The Superintendent agreed to consult with the Chairman and the Remembrancer regarding the possibility of hosting an event to mark the occasion at Guildhall.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

The Town Clerk informed Members that the Committee's next meeting would take place on 16th January 2017, after which there would be no meetings or visits until May 2017 due to the all-out Common Council election period.

19. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Resolved: 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.

20. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES

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

21. LEASE RENEWAL

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

22. EPPING FOREST GRAZING EXPANSION PLAN CONTINUITY ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

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

The Committee considered the report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

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

The Committee considered two urgent items of the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

The meeting ended at 1:00pm

Chairman

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