

ASHTEAD COMMON CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 12 January 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Ashtead Common Consultative Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 1.45 pm

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)

Sylvia Moys

Barbara Newman

David Baker (Ashtead Residents' Association)

Joseph Byllam-Barnes

Bob Eberhard (CTC Local Rights of Way)

James Irvine (Volunteers Representative)

Conor Morrow (Lower Mole Countryside Management Project)

Councillor Chris Townsend (Surrey County Council)

Officers:

David Arnold

Andy Barnard

Hadyn Robson

Andrew Thwaites

Shaun Waddell

- Town Clerk's Department

- Superintendent, The Commons

- Support Services Manager, The Commons

- Head Ranger, Ashtead Common

- Senior Ranger, Ashtead Common

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Philip Woodhouse, Douglas Mobsby, and Councillor John Northcott (Mole Valley District Council).

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

There were none.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the public minutes of the last meeting held on 27 January 2015 be approved.

Members were advised of the following matters arising from the minutes:

Tree Health

A volunteer group had been trained to spot the effects of Oak Processionary Moth, which was expected to arrive at Ashtead Common in due course.

Pollution at the Rye Brook

The pollutant had been identified as an oily substance being discharged from a high voltage electricity cable somewhere within the catchment area. The electricity company responsible for the area were currently trying to identify the cable to fix the problem, in consultation with the Environment Agency.

Engineers were being sent to the Rye Brook by the electricity company to monitor and remove the oily substance at regular intervals.

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

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 communication between City of London Corporation Ashted Common staff and the local community was generally positive and effective.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

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 a decision was expected imminently as to whether it would be first considered in the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

In response to a member's question, the Superintendent advised that, to his knowledge, the Bill had received one objection 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.

The Superintendent advised that the use of consultants had been reduced to deliver a saving of £17,000 per annum. The expertise of current staff members would be utilised in most cases and consultants would continue to be used, for example, only where an independent view was required.

In relation to increased income generation, the Superintendent advised that £6,000 was expected to be raised through additional voluntary donations at

Ashtead and Coulsdon Commons. More structured methods of donation and income streams would be developed during the next two years with a view to increase income from donations to £15-20,000 per annum. The Senior Ranger added that a donation of £1,800 had been received from a company who had recently held two separate corporate volunteering days at Ashtead Common.

In response to a member's questions regarding income generation from the leasing of office space at Ashtead Common, the Superintendent advised that the potential for shared use of the Ashtead office building was currently being explored in consultation with the City Surveyor's Department. Members noted the challenge faced by officers that leases could only be granted for a maximum of three years under the current legislation that governed the City Corporation's open spaces.

To conclude, the Committee thanked all officers for their flexibility and hard work during the Service Based Review savings process.

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7. CHANGES TO GRANT FUNDING

The Committee received a presentation from the Head Ranger of Ashtead Common regarding the changes to grant funding that affected the grant income received for the Common. The Head Ranger advised that the previous grant income of £70,000 per annum would be reduced to £33,000 per annum due to the introduction of a new Basic Payment Scheme. The new Scheme determined that the Common was eligible for a grant of £3,000 for 17.8 hectares of wood pasture compared with a grant of £40,000 for 200 hectares formerly received under the previous Single Payment Scheme. Members noted that the grant of £30,000 per annum received under the Stewardship agreement remained secure for the next five years.

Members were advised that community work and conservation land management would remain unaffected by the reduction in grant income but larger refurbishment projects would no longer be carried out yearly. In response to members' questions, the Head Ranger advised that refurbishment works required would be prioritised to the most affected parts of the Commons, so visitor experience should not be affected.

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8. MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

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

Grazing

Cows would be returning to graze on the Common later in 2016 but a programme of grazing had not progressed as officers had hoped.

Fire and Water

Five arson attacks had been carried out on the Common by an unknown group or individual in April 2015. It had been suggested to create a direct water supply to the affected parts of the common to tackle future fires but this was deemed not possible. However, officers had been reassured by the local Fire Brigade that they would be investing in training and equipment to improve their response to local wild land fires.

Community Audit Report

A local organisation had recently produced a Community Audit Report in consultation with local residents from the Wells Estate. The report recommended that a muddy, unsurfaced pathway be surfaced to enable children from the Wells Estate to take a quicker direct walking route to school. Members were reminded that it had previously been agreed not to surface any more pathways due to its negative impact on local wildlife and hydrology. Members also noted that the number of schoolchildren affected was relatively minimal for such a major piece of surfacing work to be carried out, particularly during a period of financial constraint. The Committee agreed to assess the surfacing of the pathway in question at the next visit during summer 2016 to determine its level of priority.

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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 Senior Ranger of Ashted Common that provided a review of the Annual Work Programme 2015/16 as well as a preview of the upcoming 2016/17 programme. Members received updates regarding the following matters:-

Improved Access

Works to re-surface and re-camber Bridleway 38 were completed in December 2015. The new surface should last for at least 20 years and was capable of withstanding 20 tonne vehicle movement.

Volunteer Hours

Volunteers had contributed 3,230 hours from April to September 2015, an increase of 14% from the same period in 2014. Additional volunteers had been recruited partly as a result of the creation of new volunteer sessions and events. One of the new volunteers included a long-term volunteer who had been trained as a qualified chainsaw operator to help with delivering major project work.

Veteran Tree Schedule

The Schedule was recently reviewed to develop a new approach for future years, including a reduction in the number of trees cut per year to 70. In response to members' questions, the Senior Ranger advised that the Schedule was reviewed and amended because previous version took a fundamental approach to tree conservation and prioritised conservation objectives ahead of practical observations. Arboriculturalists within the Open Spaces Department

were still working together to develop a best practice to be applied across the City Corporation's open spaces.

Review of Scrub Grassland and Rides

Concessionary Ride 1 would be divided into four quadrants during the next four yearly work programmes in order to create several areas of scrub and grassland. It was hoped that this would add more sunlight and create additional views along the route.

At the conclusion of the presentation, a member (Surrey County Council) advised that he would recommend an allocation of funds from the County Council's 2016/17 budget to contribute towards the 2016/17 Work Programme at Ashted Common.

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10. QUESTIONS

In response to a member's question, the Head Ranger advised that Mr and Mrs Burnett, local owners of land bordering the Common, would be invited to attend the summer Committee visit.

In response to a member's question regarding the Tea Room building, the Head Ranger reported that a planning proposal still had not been submitted but an application was expected soon.

Members then took this opportunity to thank the Chairman for his services to the Committee and to Ashted Common during his term as Chairman, which was due to expire in April 2016. The Chairman responded by thanking all Members for their hard work and support during his term.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

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 3.30 pm

Chairman

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