

ASHTEAD COMMON CONSULTATION GROUP
Friday, 19 January 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Ashtead Common Consultation Group held at Ashtead Estate Office, Woodfield Road, Ashtead, Surrey, KT21 2DU on Friday, 19 January 2018 at 6.30 pm

Present

Members:

Deputy Philip Woodhouse (Chairman)
Graeme Smith (Deputy Chairman)
Sylvia Moys
Bob Eberhard
Professor David Hawksworth
James Irvine
Conor Morrow
Gary Nash
Councillor Chris Townsend
Pippa Woodall

Officers:

Andy Barnard	-	Superintendent of The Commons
Andrew Thwaites	-	Head Ranger
Shaun Waddell	-	Senior Ranger
Hadyn Robson	-	Support Services Manager
Alistair MacLellan	-	Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Jeremy Simons, David Baker, Joseph Byllam-Barnes, Paul Krause and Georgina Terry.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF ANY PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members considered a tabled paper setting out proposed amendments to the Group's terms of reference and the following points were made.

- The Superintendent provided background information concerning the need to refresh the Terms of Reference
- The Superintendent confirmed that the membership of the Ashtead Common Consultation Group was the same as the former Ashtead Common Consultative Committee. He explained that the change in nomenclature for the Group reflected the fact the role of the Group was advisory rather than of a decision-making nature.

- The Superintendent noted that current Members of the Group were appointed on a four-year term, commencing 19 January 2018.
- A Member noted that the proposed amendments to the terms of reference largely dealt with concerns over the lack of named representative groups represented on the Consultation Group.
- A Member commented that membership of the Group was a two-way relationship – named representative groups had the opportunity to make their representations via the Ashtead Common Consultation Group whilst at the same time, representatives serving on the Group were responsible for reporting back to their groups on any issues discussed at the Group’s meetings.
- Members agreed to the Chairman’s suggested amendment that external groups would have ‘the right to’ a representative on the Ashtead Common Consultation Group.
- Members agreed that the wording regarding meeting venue be amended to ‘Meetings shall normally take place locally at Ashtead.’
- The Superintendent agreed that the Group should more correctly be termed ‘Consultative’ than ‘Consultation’ and to amend the terms of reference accordingly.
- Members discussed the appendix to the terms of reference, and the fact that members of the public were welcome to attend meetings of the Group, and noted that they would be welcome to address the Group at the discretion of the Chairman and according to paragraph 9 of the terms of reference, provided the smooth and orderly conduct of the meeting was assured.
- The Chairman thanked Members for their input into the proposed terms of reference.

RESOLVED, that the amended terms of reference be referred to the Epping Forest & Commons Committee for approval.

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashtead Common Consultative Committee meeting held on 23 January 2017 be approved.

Matters Arising

Rye Brook Pollution – Letter to Environment Agency

The Chairman confirmed that he had corresponded with the Environment Agency regarding Rye Brook pollution, and that the Agency had been constructive in responding to the concerns set out within the Chairman’s letter.

5. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Superintendent was heard regarding a number of matters.

5.1 **Open Spaces Bill Update**

The Superintendent was heard regarding the progress of the Open Spaces (City of London) Bill.

- The Bill had undergone its Third Reading in the House of Commons in October 2017 and had been an item at the second meeting of the Unopposed Bill Committee in the House of Lords in January 2018. Issues being considered included Fixed Penalty Notices, fly-tipping, commercial lettings and the management of sports events. The Superintendent noted that, subject to no delays being encountered, the Bill could receive Royal Assent prior to Summer 2018.
- In response to a request from the Chairman, the Town Clerk agreed to advise the Group when the Bill received Royal Assent.
- In response to a question, the Superintendent confirmed that events such as orienteering could take place on the Commons. He added that Parkrun had approached the City regarding the potential to convene regular Saturday morning Parkruns on the Common but had ultimately sought another venue.

5.2 **Achievements across The Commons - 2017**

The Superintendent was heard regarding the wider work being undertaken across the City Commons during 2017.

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

- Activity at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common included 5,500 of volunteer hours, pollarding of 82 ancient and 53 young trees, and the expansion of grazing to 75% of the overall space available. The introduction of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) to replace the Dog Control Orders that previously applied across the site, had been completed, and Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common had moreover secured Green Flag and Green Heritage status.

Kenley Common

- At Kenley Common the most high profile activity had been the continued progress of the Kenley Revival Project, which stemmed from the award of £1.1m of Heritage Lottery Funding in 2016 to preserve and promote the WW2 heritage of Kenley airfield. Targets such as visitor numbers had already been exceeded half way through the project. Wider initiatives included community archaeology days, moving a time capsule, and renovation and replacing brickwork of original blast pens. Re-enactors had also assisted in engaging with local school children. The Kenley volunteers had been shortlisted for their work at the recent London Volunteer Awards. Next steps on the project included the installation of interpretative panels across the airfield.

West Wickham and Coulsdon Common

- At West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons, the City had been successful in clarifying that the London Borough of Croydon was responsible for the maintenance of the Marlpit Triangle. A pedestrian crossing of the A232 had been installed after a degree of lobbying by the City – the crossing enabled access between West Wickham and Hayes Common. Volunteer hours totalled 6,600 of activity in this area of the City Commons.

City Commons Support Services Team

- The Superintendent noted that the Support Services Team had undertaken a range of reviews of its way of working to ensure the corporate services underpinning the work of the City Commons Team was effective as possible – this included refining process via a Finance Improvement Group, evaluating approaches to fundraising, and the employment of an events apprentice.

5.3 Budget Position 2018/19 and Beyond

The Superintendent was heard regarding the budget position for 2018/19 and beyond.

- He noted that the Open Spaces Department was expected to make a 2% saving annually, and that individual Commons such as Burnham Beeches faced a loss of specific funding items, such as parking income and grant income. To address budget reductions in part, the Superintendent would be seeking to encourage donations across the Commons.
- In response to a comment from the Chairman, the Superintendent agreed to consider encouraging corporate donations from local business. The Superintendent noted that ExxonMobil had provided a significant donation in kind of volunteers, to which the Chairman replied he would be very happy to write a letter of thanks.
- In response to a request, the Superintendent agreed to prepare a one page discussion paper ahead of the Summer Walk for key items of discussion for the Group.

6. MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Members considered a report of the Superintendent of The Commons and the following points were made.

6.1 Appendix 1 - Vision for Ashtead Common (Narrative Version)

- A Member noted that he would welcome reference to ‘features’ on the Common, and particularly the Common’s archaeological features.

- A Member concurred, and noted that various stakeholder groups such as cyclists should be referenced if possible.
- The Head Ranger noted that the vision explicitly mentioned the City's commitment to manage veteran trees and ensure veteran tree loss was kept below 1% per year.

6.2 **Appendix 2 - Fire Breaks Map**

- The Head Ranger outlined the City's planned approach to maintaining and improving existing firebreaks, and installing new ones. The future approach to firebreaks would be a subject of consultation when the next iteration of the management plan came to be developed.

6.3 **Appendix 3 - Bracken Management Map**

- The Head Ranger outlined the City's approach to managing bracken on the Common, noting that this would be the main source of fuel for any future fire affecting the Common.

6.4 **Appendix 4 - Scrub Grassland Map**

- The Head Ranger noted that scrub grassland grazing was a key component of maintaining a woodland pasture. He noted that the City had partnered with Surrey Wildlife Trust to place cattle on the Common and that he had anecdotal feedback that the present breed had proved more effective than the previous breed in maintaining the pasture.
- Members supported the gradual expansion of grazing areas on the Common from 2018/19.
- A Member representing equine interests noted that she did not expect any conflict between horse riders/cattle using the Common.
- A Member suggested that the City highlight its management of the Common via local media such as The Local.

7. **RYE BROOK POLLUTION**

The Head Ranger provided an update on pollution in Rye Brook.

- He noted that the pollutant was no longer cable oil, but now appeared to be some form of effluent. He added that the Environment Agency response had been constructive, and that a community monitoring project had been established to monitor the Brook – the Rye Brook as it crossed the Common scored lowest using the Riverfly Score Index compared to other areas of the Brook in the local area. Moreover, it scored highest in terms of the phosphates present. The South East Rivers Trust had installed a flow meter to monitor flow rates at the

outfall. Lastly – the duty ranger had been called on to deal with a sewer leak into the Brook on Christmas Day.

8. **RESOURCES - STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

The Head Ranger was heard regarding Resources of Staff and Volunteers.

- The Commons Ranger Team was now at full strength.
- Volunteers continued to have a superlative influence on the management of the Commons, with 9000 hours of volunteer time contributed throughout 2016-17. Members noted their thanks for the contributions made by the many volunteers across the Commons.
- Whilst welcoming the volunteer contribution to the Commons, a Member noted that it was such an effective resource given the City had the full-time staff resource of Rangers to ensure volunteers were supported effectively.

9. **REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18 AND PRESENTATION OF THE 2018/19 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Senior Ranger for Ashted Common was heard regarding the Annual Work Programme for 2017/18 and 2018/19.

- All veteran trees were being surveyed and a comparative analysis undertaken with survey data collected in 2012. The current survey had commenced in May 2017 but due to a health and safety issue prompted by a high tick population had been deferred until this year.
- A Bird Census had been undertaken which had shown most established species were holding up in terms of numbers, with some numbers improving e.g. whitethroats.
- The grazing project had seen a successful summer, with over 200 Common Spotted orchids in the Willow grazing area.
- During late summer 2017 a mechanical mulcher had been deployed on areas of bracken to reduce the risk of fire.
- Other surveys included those for dormice and newts.
- A number of successful events had been held on the Common including the Woodman 5 Mile run in May 2017, and the Ashted Common 10km run in September 2017. Both events had been well managed and had little negative impact on the Common.
- The Senior Ranger noted his particular thanks to a long-standing volunteer Penny Eve, and to Bournemouth University student Sam Kearsey for their contribution to the Common during 2017.

- The Annual Megatask volunteer event involved six rangers and 44 volunteers gathering to cut back hazel on the Common. The day had concluded with a BBQ using Ashtead charcoal to BBQ Epsom Common raised cattle in a good example of local sustainability.

10. **QUESTIONS**

There were no questions.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**
Oak Processionary Moth

The Head Ranger noted that OPM was present on the Common, and that based on the sample of nests identified it was estimated there was a total of 100 nests across the Commons.

Illegal Metal Detecting

The Head Ranger noted that a metal detector had illegally excavated around 20 trial pits around the earthwork on the Common, and had removed a metal pot which they had handed into a local museum. The individual had been issued with a police caution and unfortunately Surrey Archaeology had been unable to identify which of the pits the pot – which was Iron Age in date – had come from and therefore it was not possible to establish the pot's archaeological context.

A Member noted that Leatherhead Museum – which held many artefacts recovered from the Common – faced an uncertain future.

Catering Concession

The Superintendent noted that a local business had approached the City to request permission for a catering concession on the Common. The business had promised a donation of 5% of profits.

Members expressed concern over the level of infrastructure that would be needed to support the concession and the potential that it would 'urbanise' the Common. The Chairman noted that the request would undergo a full appraisal by the City and that the matter would come back to Members for consideration.

12. **DATE AND SUBJECT OF ASHTEAD CONSULTATION GROUP SUMMER WALK**

The Town Clerk agreed to contact Members outside of the meeting to identify a date and topic for the Summer 2018 Walk. In response to requests from Members, the Town Clerk agreed to convene meetings on Thursday evenings going forward.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

Chairman

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