

**WEST WICKHAM, SPRING PARK AND COULSDON COMMONS  
CONSULTATION GROUP**

**Tuesday, 30 March 2021**

**Minutes of the meeting of the West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons Consultation Group held via Microsoft Teams at 6.30 pm**

**Present**

**Members:**

Graeme Doshi-Smith (Chairman)	Brian Longman
Jeremy Simons	Sarah Lovatt
Cllr Nicholas Bennett JP	Dr Jane McLauchlin
Brian Hudson	Cllr Neil Reddin
Nicola Hunt	Avril Sleeman
Graham Lomas	

**Officers:**

Sarah Anderson	- Open Spaces Department
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent of The Commons
Helen Betteridge	- Open Spaces Department
Colin Buttery	- Director of Open Spaces
Allan Cameron	- Head Ranger (The Commons)
Barry Gutteridge	- Senior Ranger (The Commons)
Hadyn Robson	- Support Services Manager (The Commons)
Joseph Anstee	- Town Clerk's Department
Kerry Nicholls	- Town Clerk's Department
James Gibson	- Chamberlain's Department

**1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Margaret Bird, Richard Carter, Chantal Lane, Benjamin Murphy, Val Polydorou and Sam Wheatcroft.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020 were approved as a correct record.

One matter arising was considered:

**A232 Signage**

In response to concerns raised by a Member regarding road signage on the A232 Croydon Road junction with Hartfield Crescent, the Head Ranger confirmed that both the London Borough of Bromley and Transport for London had recently inspected the new pedestrian crossing and associated signage and had concluded that existing sightlines were appropriate and at the defined legal standards and dimensions.

**RESOLVED**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

**4. SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Superintendent provided an update to the Consultation Group and the following points were made:

**a) City of London Target Operating Model and Budgets**

A new Target Operating Model had been developed as part of the City of London Corporation's Fundamental Review and was being introduced via a phased approach. The Target Operating Model would significantly change the way that the City Corporation operated, including the merger of the Open Spaces, Built Environment and Consumer Production Departments into a new Department of Environment and would place a focus on frontline services. This was not anticipated to have any impact of the charitable status of the Commons but would provide the Open Spaces Department with a stronger platform to lobby for necessary resources within the City of London Corporation.

There would be a 12% budget cut across many service areas for the 2021/22 financial year which, along with the recent loss of grant income, represented £256k of the total management budget of the Commons. The budget reduction had been apportioned across individual Commons based on the potential of each site to generate income. Whilst some cost cutting measures were planned, the main focus would be on income generation such as through letting vacant properties, charitable donations and applying for grant funding. Future areas where it might be possible to make savings or generate additional income were being reviewed and could include changes to waste removal services or the introduction of charges for commercial activities. A Member noted that the possibility of opening a café in an existing building at Riddlesdown was being explored and that this would be welcomed by the local community, particularly if it had toilet facilities. The Member suggested that consideration be given to establishing it alongside a volunteer centre which could incorporate other voluntary and community services. In response to a query from another Member, the Superintendent confirmed that the possibility of making a café offer available at Farthing Downs had been reviewed in recent years but had not been considered financially viable.

**RESOLVED**, that the update be noted.

**5. MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

The Head Ranger provided an update on management planning and the following points were made:

- The draft Management Plan for West Wickham Common and Spring Park 2021-2031 had been considered at the previous meeting of the West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons Consultation Group on 29 September 2020 and had been updated in response to

Members' comments and to reflect the results of the Management Plan consultation. The public consultation had identified that the majority of visitors were of older age groups and there was a need to widen active participation by young people. A Member had submitted a question in advance of the meeting observing that the public consultation had also identified a demand for pond creation on West Wickham Common and suggesting that a historic pond site near Gates Green Road be re-established. The Head Ranger advised that there were difficulties in establishing ponds on gravel heathland but that testing would be undertaken to identify whether any sites would be suitable.

- Individual management plans for Kenley, Coulsdon, Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown Commons would shortly be circulated to Members for their views, in advance of a wider public consultation process. A Member representing the Friends of Farthing Downs advised that he had contacted several specialist organisations to support the development of closer working across the South London Downs National Nature Reserve and underlined the need to take a holistic approach in sharing expertise and encouraging public involvement.

**RESOLVED**, that the update be noted.

#### 6. **COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP APPLICATION**

The Head Ranger was heard regarding the Countryside Stewardship Scheme Grant application for West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons and the following point was made:

- The current ten-year Environmental Stewardship Scheme which had provided £58k per annum to fund conservation work across West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons would end on 31 March 2021. Work was underway to apply for funding under the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme for the five-year period commencing 1 January 2022, before it was replaced by the Environment Land Management scheme (ELMs). The Countryside Stewardship Scheme application process was made up of several stages to ensure that the application met the criteria for funding and maximised nature conservation potential and it would be key to demonstrate that indicators for success were met. Should the Countryside Stewardship Scheme application be successful, funding would commence from 1 January 2022 for a five-year period.

**RESOLVED**, that the update be noted.

#### 7. **CAR PARKS PROJECT**

The Head Ranger was heard regarding the Car Parks Project and the following points were made:

- Car parking charges had been introduced at Riddlesdown and Farthing Downs Commons on 25 January 2021 and the target income for car park charges for the 2021/22 financial year was on track to be achieved. The rollout had been supported by on-site rangers who explained the

new arrangements and raised visitors' awareness about the work required to maintain the Commons. Feedback by members of the public had been varied; however, the introduction of car parking charges had already led to a reduction in anti-social behaviour. In response to a question from a Member, the Head Ranger confirmed that volunteers would not be charged for parking when undertaking work on site.

- Members of the Commons Consultation discussed the impact of the introduction of car parking charges.
  - A Member was concerned at the introduction of car parking charges during the COVID-19 period as exercise and access to outdoor spaces were important in supporting mental and physical health. Riddlesdown Common was sited at the top of a steep incline which may lead to car parking charges having a disproportionate impact on older people and those with limited mobility, such as those joining health walks. The Superintendent confirmed that an equalities impact assessment had been undertaken for all sites prior to the introduction to car parking charges and had identified no issues. The introduction of car parking charges was part of the wider strategy for increased income generation to support the sustainable management of the Commons and blue badge holders would continue to park for free.
  - A number of concerns had been raised around the introduction of car parking charges on non-City of London Corporation social media pages. Key issues included payment methods for car parking charges and what visitors should do if they were concerned that a penalty notice may have been issued to them in error. The Superintendent confirmed that car parking charges could be paid via a Smart Phone app or credit card which were increasingly popular methods of payment. Whilst consideration had been given to introducing a cash payment option, this was very expensive and had not been considered feasible. Visitors were encouraged to contact the Support Services team for assistance with car parking charges or penalty notices where any concerns were identified.
- It was planned to introduce signage highlighting the cost of maintaining open spaces in car parking and the Head Ranger would provide case study information regarding spend on each open space to Members of the Consultation Group following the meeting to share across their networks and communities.

**RESOLVED**, that the update be noted.

#### 8. **REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

The Senior Ranger was heard regarding achievements in delivering the annual work programme 2020/21 and the following point was made:

- The Ranger Team had continued to support the delivery of the annual work programme over the past twelve months including the *Brilliant Butterflies* project at Spring Park, installation of heritage signs at Kenley Airfield and clearing an area of trees affected by Ash dieback at Farthing Downs. The Commons had seen a significant increase in visitors as well as dog ownership during the COVID-19 period, which had led to an increased emphasis on tackling litter and dog fouling issues. Access to the sites had been a key priority during this period and a focus had been placed on how they were presented which had resulted in all six open spaces in maintaining Green Flag standards. It had not been possible to continue the official volunteer programme during the COVID-19 period with the exception of projects delivered during October 2020 when lockdown restrictions had been temporarily eased; however, some volunteers had participated in annual onsite nature surveys which could be carried out safely by individuals. In response to a question from a Member, the Senior Ranger confirmed that group volunteering opportunities would be gradually reintroduced from 12 April 2021. Initially this would only be for week-day volunteering groups but it was hoped to reintroduce weekend volunteering groups at the larger sites as the year progressed.

**RESOLVED**, that the update be noted.

**9. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE CONSULTATION COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

**10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was one item of other business.

The 64-page full colour booklet that explained the history, ecology and conservation of the Happy Valley and Farthing Downs nature trail had proved extremely popular with visitors since its publication in July 2021. Communities across Croydon were supporting efforts to translate the booklet into a range of languages, including French, Polish and Hindi, and it was hoped to have a launch party for the new editions in Summer 2021.

**11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Autumn walk would be held at 2.00pm on Saturday 9 October 2021 (COVID-19 restrictions permitting).

**The meeting closed at 8.32 pm**

-----  
Chairman

**Contact Officer: Kerry Nicholls**  
**kerry.nicholls@cityoflondon.gov.uk**