

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE
Monday, 9 May 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held in a hybrid format via Teams and Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 9 May 2022 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Benjamin Murphy (Chairman)
Deputy Graeme Doshi-Smith (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy Philip Woodhouse
Caroline Haines
Gregory Lawrence
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Verderer Paul Morris
Verderer Nicholas Munday
George Abrahams
Alderman Prem Goyal
Jaspreet Hodgson

Officers:

Richard Holt	- Town Clerk's Department
Christopher Rumbles	- Town Clerk's Department
Kristina Drake	- Town Clerk's Department
Juliemma McLoughlin	- Executive Director Environment
Sally Agass	- Director of Open Spaces, Environment Department
Paul Thomson	- Assistant Director Epping Forest, Environment Department
Andy Barnard	- Assistant Director The Commons Environment Department
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Head of Visitor Services, Epping Forest
Martin Newnham	- Head Forest Keeper, Epping Forest
Mark Bailey	- City Surveyor's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Verderer H.H William Kennedy.

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

Verderer Morris noted that he would make a declaration of interest in respect of Item 21 in the non-public session.

3. **ORDER OF THE COURT OF COMMON COUNCIL**

The Committee received the Order of the Court of Common Council dated 21st April 2022, which appointed the Committee and set its Terms of Reference. The Town Clerk noted a typographic error in the name of a Verderer serving on the Committee which would be updated accordingly.

RESOLVED- That the Order of the Court be noted.

4. **ELECTION OF CHAIR**

The Committee proceeded to elect a Chairman in accordance with Standing Order No. 29. The Town Clerk informed that Benjamin Murphy, being the only Member expressing their willingness to serve, was duly elected Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for the ensuing year and took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

RESOLVED- That Benjamin Murphy be elected Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for the ensuing year.

A vote of thanks was proposed by Gregory Lawrence;

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the Members of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee wish to place on record their sincere appreciation to

GRAEME DOSHI-SMITH

Their very great and sincere thanks and appreciation for the distinguished manner, in which he has served as Chairman since 20th May 2019.

He has tackled with admirable energy and skill the considerable challenges to the management of both Epping Forest and the Commons which have presented themselves during his Chairmanship, and much has been achieved in what has been a challenging financial period.

Graeme's chairmanship was dominated by the COVID-19 national health emergency. Alongside the many vicissitudes suffered by the Nation, there has been a renewed awareness of the value of Open Spaces to the public's physical, emotional and mental health. Under Graeme's steady leadership, working closely with many partner organisations, the Charities has managed the challenges of increased visiting, with visits at Epping Forest temporarily rising from 4.3 million to 11.2 million; the hosting of a Temporary Mortuary Facility at Wanstead Flats and the need for traffic and car park restrictions at both The Commons and Epping Forest during the three national lockdown periods

The successful management of The Commons division's restructure proposals for the Target Operating Model and the twelve percent savings has ensured a bright future for these sites with the ranger and ecological teams being

enhanced. Similarly, car park charges were successfully introduced at Riddlesdown and Farthing Downs in a manner that reduced the administration impact on local teams whilst meeting income targets. At Epping Forest, increased income performance from the launch of commercial wayleaves, expanded licensing activity; improved lodge rentals and the introduction of car parking charges have ensured that the Charity has been able to maintain overall levels of service.

As Chairman Graeme has overseen the development, and approval, of ten-year plans for each of the nine commons which will guide the future of conservation, landscape, visitor and estate management for these valuable open spaces for the next decade. In addition, the future of both the Commons and Epping Forest has been further safeguarded through negotiation with Natural England and the Department of Environmental Farming and Rural Affairs for 10-year Countryside Stewardship grants to support the important work to conserve and enhance biodiversity for each of these sites.

During his tenure Graeme has played an important role in improving the management of Epping Forest with the completion of a series of key strategic documents including Parkland Management Plans for both of Epping Forest's Grade II*(Star) Registered Parks and Gardens at Wanstead and Copped Hall Parks. Individual Site Plans were completed for Chingford Plain; High Beach; Highams Park and Wanstead Flats, together with a Conservation Statement for Birch Hall Park and a Conservation Management Plan for The Grotto.

The importance of Epping Forest in the Local Plan process has also played an important role under Graeme's chairmanship with substantial recognition of the Forest within the Epping Forest District, Enfield and Waltham Forest Local Plans. Nine Local Planning Authorities are also in the process of agreeing a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy, which has been negotiated across Graeme's Chairmanship, which should realise £22 Million in Community Infrastructure Levy funds over the next 15 years for investment in the Forest to manage the increased recreational and air quality impact from additional residential development.

Similarly, there have been crucial agreements reached with public bodies during Graeme's tenure as Chairman, which will ensure the protection of the Commons for many years to come. At Burnham Beeches, the many years of negotiation between the City, Buckinghamshire County Council and Natural England have seen the approval of the Burnham Beeches Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy, an 80-year agreement providing a 500m 'no development' buffer around the Beeches a 5.6 km 'mitigation zone' for any development. As Chairman Graeme oversaw another significant milestone with Coulsdon Commons, Kenley Common, Riddlesdown and Farthing Downs joining forces with Croydon Borough Council and Natural England to form the first National Nature Reserve in over two decades. This agreement formally acknowledged the natural and recreational importance of these wonderful sites and importantly will promote additional funding.

Graeme's period as Chairman also saw the successful completion of the £1.2m Heritage Lottery funded Kenley Revival Project. This Project focussed particularly on local, national and international community engagement and forging close links with schools, concerning the Airfield's role in the Battle of Britain. A lasting legacy of the Project is the City's significant contribution to the extended the scientific understanding of Thaumacite and its wider implications for the conservation of ephemeral architecture.

Finally, the Committee wishes to place on record its recognition of Graeme's distinguished contribution to the work of the Committee and in thanking him for his generous hospitality, his colleagues convey to him their good wishes for the future, with happy memories of a substantial body of achievement of the past three years.

The outgoing Chairman received their thanks and extended his thanks to Officers noting that it had been an honour to chair the Committee. The Chairman added his thanks noting that there had been a number of key achievements in what had been a difficult context to lead the Committee in his three years as chairman.

The Chairman extended his thanks for the election and highlighted to the Committee that there was likely to be some proposed governance and structural changes at the next meeting. It was added that these changes were intended to assess the relationship between the relevant charities and the City of London Corporation to ensure that there are appropriate agreements in place for the work and the services that are being provided.

The Chairman agreed that visits should be arranged for the Committee to visit the Commons sites particularly for the benefit of Members new to the work of the Committee.

It was agreed that a budget allocation report be added as a standing item to the Committee's agendas going forward.

Following a Member's question on the impact of geo-political events on the management of the Forest the Chairman observed that there had been a number great educational visits to Epping Forest arranged for asylum seekers. The Chair of the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee noted that subjects such as this which impacted across the open spaces would be appropriately dealt with by the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee.

5. **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR**

The Committee proceeded to elect a Deputy Chairman in accordance with Standing Order No. 30. The Town Clerk informed that Graeme Doshi-Smith, being the only Member expressing their willingness to serve, was duly elected Deputy Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for the ensuing year.

RESOLVED– That Deputy Graeme Doshi-Smith be elected as Deputy Chairman for the ensuing year.

6. MINUTES

6.1 **Public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee meeting held on the 17th of January 2022.**

The Committee considered the public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee held on the 17th of January 2022.

The Assistant Director updated on a number of items arising from the last meeting particularly including informing the Committee that the Sesquicentennial Celebrations Planning Group will start in October 2022, The Graziers meeting is postponed due to loss of key staff with the content of the CSS bids needing to be considered by the Committee in July before the graziers are met with, An outcome is awaited on the High Beach Gating Order and discussions where under with Essex Bridleway Trust on improvement to the land in the area following an incident. In addition, with relation to film charges it was confirmed that a review by the Director of Communications had concluded that the rates for filming were competitive.

Following this comment, a Member asked if indeed the rates are competitive, is there interest to reflect this. It was confirmed that there were a large volume of enquires received at small, medium to large scale. Further to this the process for ensuring that any filming did not adversely affect the Forest was provided. The Chairman requested that the filming policy be kept under review as this was likely to be an important revenue source going forward.

RESOLVED- That the public minutes of the previous meeting of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee held on the 17th of January 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

6.2 * **To note the minutes of the Epping Forest Consultative Committee meeting on 9 February 2022**

The Committee received the minutes of the Epping Forest Consultative Committee meeting held on the 9th of February.

RESOLVED- That the minutes be noted.

7. **2022/23 COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

The Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk on the Committee appointment for 2022/23.

The Committee agreed to standardise the names of all the consultative bodies to consultative group to clearly define the difference between the Epping Forest and Commons Committee as the formal decision making body and the groups as consultative. In addition, the edition to the various consultative groups terms of reference to reflect the updated job titles of the superintendent to assistant

director and support function to be managed locally by the Environment Department was also agreed.

Verderer Paul Morris, as the only member expressing an interest in standing, was appointed as a local observer to the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee.

RESOLVED- That-

- I. The previous composition of the following Consultative Groups be appointed:
 - Ashted Commons Consultative Group;
 - Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultative Group;
 - West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons Consultative Group;
 - Epping Forest Consultative Group.
- II. That Verderer Paul Morris be appointed as the Epping Forest and Commons Committee local observer on the Open spaces and City Gardens Committee; and
- III. That the Consultative Groups' Terms of Reference be updated to reflect that they will be supported locally by the Environment Department and the updated job titles of relevant staff.

8. APPLICATION TO NATURAL ENGLAND FOR RECOGNITION AS A NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment regarding the application to Natural England for recognition as a National Nature Reserve.

The Committee observed that it was important that the concerns of the Epping Forest Consultative Group (previously Committee) are noted and that a further report which detailed the possible impacts of the National Nature Reserve recognition was required to make a fully informed decision on the matter.

RESOLVED- The completion an Expression of Interest to Natural England for the designation of the majority of Epping Forest and its associated Buffer land as a National Nature Reserve be approved.

9. EPPING FOREST WORK PROGRAMME 2022/2023

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director Environment on the Epping Forest Work Programme 2022/23.

Responding to a Committee Member's questions it was confirmed that contractors were only used when appropriate and that the income for the sale of wood was minimal, noting that some of the wood be given to local community groups free of charge.

Following a Committee Member's request Officers provided an update on Churchill Avenue project.

The Chairman noted that the Committee needed to be mindful of risks and keep these in review. It was confirmed that the backlog of tree safety words had been included on the Local Risk Register.

RESOLVED- That the annual work programme be approved.

10. **PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS 1952-2022 QUEEN'S GREEN CANOPY - PROPOSED TREE PLANTING**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment on the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations 1952-2022 Queen Green Canopy Proposed Tree Planting.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

11. *** EPPING FOREST CAR PARK CHARGING - PHASE 3**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment on the Epping Forest Car Park Charging Phase 3. Introducing the report, the Members were informed of the challenges met throughout stages one and two of the introduction of car parking charges, how those issues have been resolved and also those that are still ongoing. In addition, the Committee were informed of the Environment Department's action to address some of the feedback that had been received from the public in providing longer stay and free parking options regarding the management of visitors in terms of encouraging visits away from the SAC (Special Area of Conservation).

Following a question from the Chairman it was clarified that free parking cannot be permitted inside the SAC as a requirement of Natural England and their Habitats regulation assessment, which was conducted at the outset of implementing car parking charges. It was added that it was a requirement of Natural England in order to prevent displacement that charging has to be implemented in all car parks that are in or adjacent to the SAC.

Replying to a Member's concern the reasoning behind the introduction of car parking charging was provided and it was confirmed that these reasons were explained fully in the background reports which were all received by the Committee. It was added these charges were introduced for a number of reasons not just budgetary concerns.

A Member observed that there was objection to car parking charges on a local level. The Chairman commented that he hoped that the car parking charges would be understandable when the improvements to the carpark become more visible. A Committee Member expressed concerns about the project and requested that a review be completed before it was taken any further. Members asked that Officers remember that a 'one size fits all' approach, is not appropriate as there are some small car parks where it's uneconomical or too burdensome to manage the car park which it was important to reconsider. The Chairman noted that this was likely to be an ongoing concern which would need to consider the funds being spent and how much income is generated. Officers agreed that an annual review would be undertaken however it was overserved

there were significant constraints within which this review would need to take place.

It was confirmed that Members received a report at Committee in January this year, noting this report complements the prior review, as a final review. It was added that visitors comments have been considered and incorporated into the scheme, as far as possible, within the constraints.

The Chairman noted that the City of London Corporation was in conversation with local authorities on the public transport plans for the Forest.

An update was given regarding the reported vandalism towards the payment machines at the effected car parks noting that all effected signs and machines had been replaced.

RESOLVED- That: -

- I. The comments made by the Consultative Committee be noted; and
- II. That the recommended options for future car park arrangements be agreed.

12. *** EPPING FOREST - SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE FOR DECEMBER 2021 TO MARCH 2022 (SEF 13/22)**

The Committee received a report of Executive Director Environment which provided the Epping Forest Superintendent's update for December 2021 to March 2022.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted

13. ***NATURAL ENVIRONMENT EPPING FOREST FORWARD AGENDA PLAN 2022**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director Environment on the Natural Environment Epping Forest Forward Agenda Plan 2022.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

14. **PROVISION OF CAR PARK CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS THE COMMONS DIVISION AT CAR PARKS AT BURNHAM BEECHES, RIDDLEDOWN AND FARTHING DOWNS.**

The Committee received a report of Executive Director Environment on the Provision of car parking infrastructure across the Commons Division at car parks at Burnham Beeches, Riddlesdown and Farthing Downs.

RESOLVED- That: -

- I. The G6 report be noted; and
- II. The closure of this project be approved.

15. **DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLANS AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESULTS - FARTHING DOWNS, RIDDLEDOWN, KENLEY COMMON & COULSDON COMMON**

The Committee agreed that, as the management plans had not been successfully uploaded due to a technical issue, the report would be deferred.

RESOLVED- That the report be deferred.

16. * **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S UPDATE FOR THE COMMONS INCLUDING ANNUAL REPORT OF PSPO INCIDENTS.**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director on the Assistant Director's update for the Commons including annual report of PSPO incidents.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

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

Following a Member's query the Chair agreed that more work needed to be done on communications, both internally and externally, to ensure that all partners and stakeholders had access to the information regarding the work of the Committee as required. The Chair of the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee informed that communications across the whole of the open spaces was being assessed which would be reviewed at the upcoming Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee away day. A Committee member observed that effective communications were vital for the Committee to exercising the powers and duties of the Court of Common Council as Conservators of Epping Forest.

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

The Chairman welcomed the new and returning Members to the Committee and thanked those Members who were no longer serving on the Committee for their service.

19. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A) 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**

The Committee considered the non-public minutes of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee meeting held on the 17th of January 2022.

RESOLVED- That the non-public minutes of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee meeting held on the 17th of January 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

21. **EPPING FOREST CATERING AND LEISURE FACILITIES LEASE RENEWALS - VARIOUS (SEF 15/22)**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment on the Epping Forest Catering and Leisure Facilities Lease Renewals.

The Committee agreed to suspend Standing Order 40, taking the meeting beyond two hours.

RESOLVED- That the report be approved.

22. EPPING FOREST CATERING AND LEISURE FACILITIES LEASE RENEWALS - (SEF 16/22)

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment on the Epping Forest Catering Tenants Lease Renewals Butlers Retreat.

RESOLVED- That the report be approved.

23. BALDWINS AND BIRCH HALL PARK PONDS

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment on Baldwins and Birch Hall Park Ponds.

RESOLVED- That the report be approved

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

The Committee received one question in the non-public session.

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

There was no urgent business considered in the non-public session.

26. CONFIDENTIAL REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk on action taken.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 1.19 pm

Chairman

**Contact Officer: Richard Holt
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