

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE
Monday, 11 July 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 11 July 2022 at
11.00 am and available to view at www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEqaLC-Y2E.

Present

Members:

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

Officers:

Sally Agass	- Director of Natural Environment
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent
Richard Holt, Clerk	- Town Clerk's Department
Christopher Rumbles	- Town Clerk's Department
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Head of Visitor Services, Epping Forest
Sally Gadsdon	- Environmental Stewardship Officer
Jo Hurst	- Business Manager, Epping Forest
Elizabeth Lucas	- Principal Surveyor
Amba Nkundo	- Natural Environment
Tristian Veta	- London Agent & Planning Officer
Nicholas Welland	- Senior Principal Surveyor

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Verderer Paul Morris, Alderman Prem Goyal and Madush Gupta.

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

There were no declarations.

3. EPPING FOREST HERITAGE TRUST

The Chairman welcomed Peter Lewis, Chief Executive of Epping Forest Heritage Trust (the Trust) to the meeting. The Chairman confirmed that he thought formal introduction would be beneficial, given he is new in the role and is to begin looking at partnership working with the City Corporation and at where opportunities may exist to partner on specific projects moving forwards,

whilst also allowing an opportunity to understand the work currently being done by The Trust in developing a new strategy.

The Chief Executive talked the Board through the work he had been mandated to undertake, looking at the impact of the Trust and provided Members with an overview of the Trust's strategy due for launch next week. He also highlighted a quick win through continuing the strong partnership working with the City Corporation that had already contributed to making the Trust's strategy stronger and also talked about engagement with Members and the importance of putting the Forest at the heart of decision making.

The Chief Executive confirmed the Trust were committed to protecting the Forest for everyone's enjoyment now and for generations to come and remarked on how it was important for everyone to work together to achieve maximum impact.

The Chief Executive responded to points raised and highlighted the work that was already taking place looking to improve diversity among Forest visitors through ongoing partnership work with the City Corporation, neighbouring London Authorities and the voluntary community. Work was also taking place with relevant organisations looking to bring people into the Forest from across different age ranges and through a targeted approach.

The Chairman welcomed the presentation commenting on how he considered it very helpful to give everyone an overview of the work that had been taking place to date, and how it is important to understand the overlap in areas of work, making sure it was seen by the public that we were talking with one voice and highlighting areas of joint working e.g., volunteering and the Visitor Centre at High Beach. There is a need to think about education, tying it all together and with this being a really important area going forward.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Epping Forest Heritage Trust's new strategy as outlined would be launched within the next week.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for allowing time in his diary to come in and present to the Committee today.

4. **MINUTES**

- a) The public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee held on 9th May 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

A Member referred to the size of the agenda pack for the meeting today and suggested certain items could be circulated separately in advance e.g., consultative group minutes. The Chairman confirmed that going forward he would be holding an agenda setting meeting in advance of circulation of the pack, which he would anticipate helping to address the issue raised.

b) * Minutes of Consultative Groups - The Commons

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director Environment providing minutes of the most recent meetings of Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common, West Wickham, Spring Park, the Coulsdon Commons and Ashtead Common Consultative Groups.

RECEIVED

5. * EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS COMMITTEE DATES 2022

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk providing a schedule of relevant committee, meeting and visit dates.

RECEIVED

6. COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP 2023 APPLICATIONS PROPOSALS (SEF 17/22B)

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment seeking approval of new financial initiatives not currently included in the Epping Forest Local Risk budget.

Members were supportive of a need to make the applications. It was explained that certain areas would require additional support as the grant applications, if successful would not cover 100% of the funding required. As part of the final proposal, additional areas would need factoring in when considering the Target Operating Model, staffing resource and money. Members noted that proposals would be worked up and brought back to Committee giving a clearer idea of staff resources.

A Member remarked on there being no reference to inclusion within the proposals and it was clarified that the Government grant does not score in terms of involving the community and it was focussed on numbers and national habitat targets, however there will be an opportunity to build wider engagement, inclusivity and accessibility into delivery proposals at a later stage. .

RESOLVED: That Members: -

- Approve the preparation and consultation upon the three Countryside Stewardship applications for Epping Forest Part II, Wanstead Park and Epping Forest Buffer Land, subject to further final approval of the final applications.

7. COPPED HALL PARK PROPOSALS (SEF 18/22B)

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Environment providing more detail and updated proposals relating to the Copped Hall Parkland Management Plan.

The Chairman remarked on this being one of the most exciting projects he had seen for some time when considering what it would mean on the ground and it would be a great step forward.

RESOLVED: That Members;

- Approve the preparation and consultation upon the revised Copped Hall Park Countryside Stewardship proposals, subject to further final approval of the application by your Committee.

8. **EPPING FOREST CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS - REQUEST TO USE CO-OPTION POWERS (SEF25/22)**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment seeking approval of the appointment of Co-opted Members on to the Epping Forest Consultative Committee.

RESOLVED: That Members: -

- Approve the co-option of the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers as the fourth Friends/Voluntary application for the remaining period within the Group's three-year term.

9. *** EPPING FOREST - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S UPDATE FOR APRIL - MAY 2022 (SEF 20/22)**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Environment summarising the Epping Forest Division's activities across April and May 2022.

Members noted that total visitor numbers to the High Beach Visitor Centre for April had not been included within the update and these were confirmed as 1052 for April, 798 for May and 767 for June.

The Committee were reminded of an approval in principle that had been granted some time ago for a concert on Chingford Plain on 10th and 11th September. A proposal had now been to London Borough of Waltham Forest for a premises licence, which had been agreed in principle subject to the general conditions of that licence with detail on health and safety, transport planning etc. There was an outline programme for the event, with a link also being included on the City Corporation's website.

The Chairman remarked on a risk of wildfires at this time, acknowledging the significant work taking place around this, whilst also stressing the importance of Members of the public reporting any incidents they may be witness to, with no fires being allowed across any of the Open Spaces, Epping Forest or Commons land during this period.

RECEIVED

10. *** NATURAL ENVIRONMENT EPPING FOREST FORWARD AGENDA PLAN 2022 (SEF 19/22B)**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment providing them with an Epping Forest Agenda Plan cover the next six meetings of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

RECEIVED

11. * **EPHING FOREST TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021**

The Committee received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director Environment providing the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year ended 31 March 2021 for Epping Forest.

The Chairman highlighted that there were reports were on the agenda relating to the Commons strategies and he referred to his previous comments that he did not consider the way in which financial reporting was produced for this collection of charities was sufficient to allow for rigorous challenge as delegated trustees of the City Corporation.

The Chairman added how he was pleased to report that there had been some good progress on this with the Chamberlain appointing an individual with charitable expertise in financial accounting and dedicating them to Open Spaces initially to make sure there is standardised financial reporting at each meeting going forward. The Chairman referred to there being some errors within the report that he had picked up on and would reference to Audit and Risk Management Committee, with a Member referring to similar errors picked up in reporting of Markets Board.

A Member highlighted a need for ongoing expertise and of taking a long-term view on financial reporting and questioned how this would be achieved through appointing someone on a 12 month contract. The Chairman responded confirming there was certainly a desire to improve the expertise long term, but on occasions there was a benefit in having someone senior come in for a shorter period of time to make changes needed before handing back for including as part of due process. Chamberlain's Department had also been quite radical in responding to the Target Operating Model and it was difficult to comment on what the long term objectives were for this.

The Chairman assured the Committee that there remained an ongoing discussion, with a follow up meeting planned next week to understand the Chamberlain's position in terms draft reporting.

The Committee Chairman concluded the discussion and stated his intention to write to the Chairman of Audit and Risk Management Committee highlighting his concerns. A Member asked for the letter to be shared with the Committee, remarking on how there were other Committees with similar issues in relation to reporting.

RECEIVED

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

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment presenting draft management plans for Farthing Downs, Riddlesdown, Kenley Common and Coulsdon Common and seeking approval of them.

A Member commented on the huge number of volunteers and asked that congratulations be passed to the team involved, with it being really important for the local communities be involved in these areas and to understand the value they offer. The Chairman concurred with the comment, adding how there was a very well informed group of stakeholders that were all trying to pull in the right direction and they were adding real value to the plans.

The Chairman asked that the Committee's thanks be passed on to all those involved.

RESOLVED: That Members: -

- Approve the 4 final, draft management plans (Appendices 1 - 4) and associated consultation reports (Appendices 5 - 8) so that they can be submitted to Natural England for ratification and implementation as of 1st April 2022 (NB. to be backdated due to cancellation of March 2022 meeting of this committee and technical challenges in May)

13. *** ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S UPDATE FOR THE COMMONS**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director Environment providing a general update on issues across the nine sites within 'The Commons' division that may be of interest to Members and that was supplementary to the monthly email updates.

RECEIVED

14. *** ASHTEAD COMMON TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021**

The Committee received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director Environment providing the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year ended 31 March 2021 for Ashtead Common.

RECEIVED

15. *** BURNHAM BEECHES AND STOKE COMMON TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021**

The Committee received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director Environment providing the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statement for the Year ended 31 March 2021 for Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.

RECEIVED

16. *** WEST WICKHAM COMMON AND SPRING PARK WOOD, COULSDON AND OTHER COMMONS TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021**

The Committee received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director Environment providing the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial

Statements for the Year ended 31 March 2021 for West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood, Coulsdon and other Commons.

RECEIVED

17. *** REVENUE OUTTURN 2021/22 - EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS**

The Committee received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director Environment comparing revenue outturn for the service overseen by the Committee in 2021 / 22 with the final agreed budget.

A Member referred to their recent email correspondence in which they had been told Epping Forest had no overspend and their challenge of this. The Chairman stressed a need for consistent reporting and confirmed he was planning to hold a one off deep dive session to go through the detail properly so that everyone can have complete transparency and the position was understood.

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

There were no questions.

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

Open Spaces Awayday – The Chairman referred to the awayday that had provided an opportunity to look at the strategy of Open Spaces, allowing for a constructive conversation with officers and consider any gaps, structure, key themes and what it was the City Corporation wanted to achieve from investing in the Open Spaces going forward.

Wanstead Park Ponds – The Committee noted there were very complicated issues that needed working through in detail at the next meeting, with the item a red risk and the ponds likely to start drying up in the coming months.

Risk Management Report – Members noted that a risk management update had been omitted from the pack providing a year end update and management update report. Members were given an assurance that all Committee business was being risk managed in line with the City Corporation's approach to risk management, with a full risk review due to take place shortly looking at the protocol for the whole department to ensure appropriate processes were in place and a report to follow in the autumn.

20. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business. The following matters relate to business under the remit of the Court of Common Council acting for the City Corporation as charity Trustee, to which Part VA and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 public access to meetings provisions do not apply. The following items contain sensitive information which it is not in the best interests of the charity to

consider in a public meeting (engaging similar considerations as under paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act)

21. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

The non-public minutes of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee meeting on 9 May 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

22. **SEF 21/22 MACHINERY FUND - RENEWAL OF EQUIPMENT**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment relating to machinery fund renewal of equipment.

23. **SEF 22/22 LEASE OF BUILDING**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment relating to lease of a building.

24. **SEF 23/22 GRANT OF EASEMENT**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment relating to granting of easement.

25. **SEF 24/22 GRANT OF EASEMENT AND DEED OF RELEASE**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment relating to grant of easement and deed of release.

26. *** EPPING FOREST HERITAGE TRUST**

The committee received a non-public appendix to be read in conjunction with the public presentation at item 3)

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

The Committee received two questions in non-public session.

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

There were no additional items of business.

The meeting ended at 1.08pm

Chairman

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