

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE
Thursday, 18 July 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 18 July 2024 at
10.00 am

Present

Members:

Benjamin Murphy (Chairman)
Caroline Haines (Deputy Chairman)
George Abrahams
Jaspreet Hodgson
Alderman Vincent Keaveny, CBE
Eamonn Mullally (Ex-Officio Member)
Philip Woodhouse
Verderer Nicholas Munday

In Attendance:

Verderer William Kennedy
Alderman Sir Nicholas Lyons
Verderer Paul Morris

External:

Peter Lewis (Epping Forest Heritage Trust)

Officers:

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|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Clem Harcourt | - Chamberlain's Department |
| Simon Owen | - Chamberlain's Department |
| Emma Thorne | - City Bridge Foundation |
| Joana Antonio | - City Surveyor's Department |
| Anna Cowperthwaite | - Comptroller and City Solicitor's |
| Emily Brennan | - Environment Department |
| Tanith Cook | - Environment Department |
| Jacqueline Eggleston | - Environment Department |
| Joanne Hill | - Environment Department |
| Jo Hurst | - Environment Department |
| Rob Shakespeare | - Environment Department |
| Geoff Sinclair | - Environment Department |
| Tristan Vetta | - Environment Department |
| Callum Southern | - Town Clerk's Department |

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from David Sales.

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

No declarations of interest were made.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That – the public minutes and the non-public summary of the meeting held on 22 May 2024 were approved as a correct record.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

4.1 ***Action Log**

Members received the actions log and, during the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) In reference to Action 2022-1: The Lodge: Income Generation report, Officers indicated it would be built in as part of the project plan going to Committee in September and several condition surveys had been carried out.
- b) Officers reported on the workshops that had been held, in relation to Action 2023-2: Target Operating Model Review, to collect staff feedback; the feedback would be reviewed by the end of the Summer, early Autumn, and Officers would make some recommendations to the Committee.
- c) It was confirmed that Action 2023-3: The Warren Battery Storage Facility Introduction had been installed and completed.
- d) Officers confirmed there was now wi-fi at Coulsdon Common and Action 2023-4: Digital Enablement had been completed.
- e) In relation to Action 2023-5: Corporate Plan and Strategies, Officers explained it needed to come to Committee in the Autumn.
- f) Officers provided an update on Action 2024-7: Funding, explaining that specific targets and priority areas would be identified, drafted and once agreed by the Committee, would be incorporated into the five-year business plan. The Chairman suggested merging actions relating to prioritisation and the action plan.
- g) Officers reported that a full, detailed risk register would be presented to Committee in September, in reference to Action 2024-8: Risk Management; the Chairman confirmed that Sub-Action 1 could be closed.

- h) The Committee received an update on Action 2024-9: Phone-In Reporting Service by Officers who informed that they were investigating alternative services and making comparisons; further information would be provided at the next Committee meeting.
- i) On Action 2024-11: The Commons, Officers indicated a paper on apprenticeships would be coming to Committee in September and would provide information on why numbers on trees did not correspond with the ancient tree form.

5. **2024/25 COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

RESOLVED – That, Members agreed to grant delegated authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Epping Forest & Commons Committee, to consider and approve the appointments to the following consultative groups, following recommendations by the Natural Environment Director (based on the existing skills audit):

- Epping Forest Consultative Group;
- Ashtead Common Consultative Group;
- Coulsdon Commons, West Wickham & Spring Park Consultative Group;
- Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultative Group; and
- Deer Management Oversight Group

6. ***UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE HERITAGE TRUST**

The Committee received a report and presentation from Peter Lewis of the Epping Forest Heritage Trust.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) The Chairman emphasised the usefulness of the Epping Forest charity's partnership with the Heritage Trust as the Trust were able to apply for complementary grants that the charity was unable to apply for.
- b) The Committee considered how the Trust was measuring a sense of belonging and stewardship to the Forest. Peter Lewis responded that feedback was gathered from every session but accepted the need for more work to be done of analysing visitors' connection to the Forest.
- c) It was asked whether employer days were advertised to Corporation staff and suggested making partner organisations and contractors aware of this. Officers responded this had been done at The Commons on several occasions.
- d) Discussed what work was being done with schools. Specific days were now reserved for specific activities as a day for the academies had been tricky to organise in the past. 40,000 pupils had been involved in the learning spaces across the open spaces in the last year.

- e) It was emphasised by the Chairman that Epping Forest was facilitating the Duke of Edinburgh awards, Army Cadets' training, the Scouts and sports provision.
- f) Concerns were raised regarding littering in the Forest. Peter Lewis responded that content was included at events to highlight appropriate behaviour and the Forest bylaws.
- g) Members suggested the City Belonging Project may be a way of encouraging organisations to engage with the Corporation through corporate volunteering days.
- h) The Committee discussed potentially involving prisoners undergoing rehabilitation and linking that to the apprenticeship scheme at the Forest.
- i) It was considered whether the Trust had used NPS to look at visitor trends. Peter Lewis confirmed it was used for walks; trialling was underway to use it once visitors had signed up for events on Eventbrite.
- j) Members of the Committee expressed the need to build diversity objectives into the membership of consultative committees.

RECEIVED.

7. ***EPPING FOREST - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S UPDATE**

The Committee received the Assistant Director's update which summarised Epping Forest's progress against objectives since May 2024 with updates of note.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) Members identified an error with the financial year figures of the golf course.
- b) The Committee enquired on the feedback to the new model staff away day. Officers reported it was well received.
- c) It was suggested a deep dive be done on the Field Studies Council at High Beach on how that linked into the Corporation's wider education strategy.
- d) The Chairman noted that Epping Forest District Council were creating master plans for specific sites for development across the district as part of their Local Plan. He had been working with officers to formulate a response to that.
- e) Officers reported, following requests for background on rough sleeping and drug use, that the south of the Forest did have issues with this and a

joint operations were being carried out with the Metropolitan Police to sweep out the detritus. Further work was planned for September.

- f) Committee Members discussed how effective re-housing efforts had been. Officers explained they worked closely with agencies to re-home rough sleepers, but noted drug use was a much bigger issue.

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8. ***THE COMMONS - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S UPDATE**

The Committee received the Assistant Director's update which summarised activities across The Commons between January and March 2024.

RECEIVED.

9. **PROPOSAL FOR A CONFERENCE ON THE BIODIVERSITY OF POLLARDED TREES**

The Committee received a report which described a proposal for hosting a two-day conference in association with Ancient Tree Forum (ATF) on biodiversity and conservation of veteran trees.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) The Committee considered whether there were opportunities for income generation. Officers explained they were looking at sponsorship of the event once the venue was confirmed.
- b) Members suggested reaching out to the Royal Household through the Remembrancer's Office as it may be a matter of interest to His Majesty, The King.

RESOLVED – That, Members agreed to Officers from Burnham Beeches and City Commons working with the ATF to host a conference at Burnham Beeches on the biodiversity and conservation of veteran trees.

10. **THE GROTTO, WANSTEAD PARK UPDATE**

The Committee received a report that updated on actions being taken and planned to remove Wanstead Park Grotto from the Heritage at Risk Register (HARR) and ensure that it has a funded Conservation Management Plan in place which would protect it for the future. The report also summarised the work to date, the current position, the options and confirmed that the repair of the Grotto would enter the gateway process as a project from Autumn 2024.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Approved the continuation and completion of a Restoration and Maintenance Plan (RMP) for the Grotto, which would identify the specific

repairs and maintenance regime that would support its removal from the Heritage at Risk Register, as per Option A in this report.

- Authorised officers to secure listed building consent for the delivery of the repairs identified in the RMP. The activities were fully funded through the Cyclical Works Programme.
- Advised officers on the further pursuit of Option B, namely the reinstatement of original fabric and restoration of features within the structure and enhancement of the immediate setting of the Grotto.
- Noted the repair of the Grotto will enter the gateway process as a project from Autumn 2024 and would be subject to the Committee's scrutiny, as per corporate project procedure.
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11. ***REVENUE OUTTURN - 2023/24**

The Committee received a report that compared the revenue outturn for services overseen by the Committee in 2023/24 with the final budget for the year. Overall, there was an underspend of £50,000 for the services overseen by the Committee compared with the final budget for the year.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) The Committee raised the issue of significant variance on recharges and the need to review the governance and accountability in prioritising work in the backlog. Officers reported that different options were being finalised regarding how to allocate recharges for the financial year and would go before Members for agreement.
- b) Members queried whether the bow wave was included on top of the financial figures behind the budget position for 2023/24. Officers explained that £133m was the projection of the scheme for 2024/25 and future financial years.
- c) It was suggested by a Member it would be useful to have a paragraph in the charities review outlining assets or items that had previously been relinquished. The Chairman highlighted that a position had been agreed where income generated by the charity could be retained by the charity for a specific purpose and opportunities to raise money would be ring fenced back to areas for agreement as part of the charity review.
- d) It was reiterated by the Committee that the terminology should be changed from 'bow wave' to 'backlog'.

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

It was highlighted by the Chairman that the Terms of Reference for the Epping Forest Consultative Committee in the agenda pack was outdated and the new version could be found on the Members SharePoint page.

Members also highlighted that the Deer Management Oversight Group Terms of Reference was incorrect, there were five members of the group, not four.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

A Member of the Committee raised concerns about the condition of oak trees in the Forest. Officers indicated they would investigate the problem.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That, 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) and will be considered in non-public session.

Part 2 – Non Public Agenda

15. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES

RESOLVED, that – the non-public minutes, subject to amendments, of the meeting held on 22 May 2024 were approved as a correct record.

16. MATTERS ARISING

16.1 *Action Log

Members received the Action Log.

17. REQUEST FOR THE PROVISION OF A DEED OF GRANT EASEMENT

The Committee received a report of the Natural Environment Director.

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

There were no questions.

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

There were no items of business that the Chairman considered urgent.

Part 3 – Confidential Agenda

20. SERVICE PROVISION OPTIONS

The Committee received a report of the Natural Environment Director.

The meeting ended at 11.35 am

Chairman

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