

ASHTEAD COMMON CONSULTATIVE GROUP
Thursday, 7 February 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Ashtead Common Consultative Group held at Ashtead Estate Office, Woodfield Road, Ashtead, Surrey, KT21 2DU on Thursday, 7 February 2019 at 6.30 pm

Present

Members:

Sylvia Moys (In the Chair)
Bob Eberhard
Cllr David Hawksworth CBE
James Irvine
Paul Krause
Councillor Chris Townsend

Officers:

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Philip Woodhouse. Graeme Smith, Jeremy Simons, David Baker, Gary Nash, Pippa Woodall and Georgina Terry.

Sylvia Moys was in the chair and welcomed Chrissy Kerton who was attending in the room of David Baker.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2018 be approved as a correct record, subject to the title of the Group being corrected to Ashtead Common Consultative Group'.

Matters Arising

Terms of Reference

The Superintendent confirmed that the terms of reference had been referred to the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

4. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Superintendent provided a general update to the Group and the following points were made.

4.1 **Achievements & projects across the Commons 2018**

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

- The Superintendent noted that 5,500 volunteer hours had been provided at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common. Moreover the café tenancy had ended in Summer 2018 and the City was now out to tender for a new provider. The Stoke Common Management Plan had been approved, and the Burnham Beeches Management Plan was currently being drafted. Officers were also applying for new stewardship grants.

West Wickham and Coulsdon Common

- 5,300 volunteer hours had been provided at Coulsdon Common and 550 volunteer hours at West Wickham.

Farthing Down

- Two miles of bank and ditch had been re-excavated to prevent vehicle damage to the site.

Kenley Common

- The Kenley Revival project had been an example of successful public engagement, however the brick mortar used on the blast pens had started to fail. Restoration work to the pens had therefore been extended to December 2019 and the City was engaged in a legal process to recover its costs. Once the pens were fully restored, infographic boards would be installed.

The Commons Support Services

- The Superintendent noted the sterling work of the back-office support team at The Commons.

4.2 **Budget position 19/20 and beyond**

- The Superintendent noted that the 2% savings target for The Commons had now been extended up until 2024. This involved a reduction in budget from £402k in 2017/18 to £329k in 2023/24. The scale of the reduction in budget meant that cost items such as the management of dog waste - costing £53k – needed to be reviewed.
- There still remained opportunities to raise revenue in car parking, and events licenses had a target income of £1k. Donations were a limited income stream at a total of £3k.

- The Superintendent continued, noting that City's Cash would likely be under further pressure from 2020 and therefore it was likely that further savings would be required. Overall, the City would focus on meeting its statutory duties for Ashtead Common i.e. conservation of habitats.
- Moreover, officers at The Commons were obliged to meet the objectives of the City's Corporate Plan, as well as ensuring an equitable spend across all demographics of persons who used The Commons i.e. not spending budgets disproportionately on specific user groups such as dog walkers.
- In response to a question, the Superintendent replied that it would be sensible to review the potential to charge professional dog walkers for the use of The Commons through issuing them with an annual licence.

5. VIABILITY OF CATERING FACILITY ON ASHTEAD COMMON

The Head Ranger was heard regarding the viability of a catering facility on Ashtead Common and the following points were made.

- The Head Ranger noted that the Consultative Group had been briefed at its January 2018 on an approach for a catering concession on Ashtead Common. The City had appointed a consultant to review the viability of such a concession and had provided a written report noting that there was a lack of a viable business case for a catering facility at Ashtead Common.
- A Member noted that he would not welcome a further provider and felt that any further catering provision would meet with local opposition. Members endorsed the view that there was no viable business case for a catering facility on Ashtead Common.

6. EVENTS POLICY - AS AGREED BY THE EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE ON 19 NOVEMBER 2018

Members considered the Open Spaces Departmental Events Policy Part One and The Commons Open Spaces Events Policy Part Two and the following points were made.

- The Superintendent noted that the policy aimed to formalise arrangements for the management of events that were already commonly employed across The Commons. The new policy allowed officers to implement charges to cover the administrative costs of any 'hire' of City Open Spaces for the purpose of events.
- In response to a question, the Head Ranger noted that the largest event commonly held on Ashtead Common was a 10k run organised by the Ashtead Running Group. The Head Ranger added that it would not be possible to licence school visits to Ashtead Common, nor could the City, ultimately, prevent a general public right of access.

- The Chairman suggested that any communications regarding the policy should highlight the need for events to have appropriate insurance in place.
- In response to a question, the Head Ranger noted that professional dog walkers did operate on Ashted Common, and were both covered by a voluntary code, and proactively approached by Rangers.

RESOLVED, that the Open Spaces Departmental Events Policy Part One and The Commons Open Spaces Events Policy Part Two be received.

7. MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Head Ranger was heard regarding Management Planning and the following points were made.

- The Head Ranger noted that the current Management Plan ran until 2021 and was informed by a vision that the Consultative Group had contributed to. Planned Management Plan works included work on firebreaks, and bracken control; scrub management; ecological surveys (in particular a survey of bats); and grazing management.

8. 2019 GRAZING EXPANSION

The Head Ranger was heard regarding 2019 Grazing Expansion and the following points were made.

- The Head Ranger noted that new fencing was being installed along the Rye side of the Common, and the ambition remained to install 'invisible fencing'.
- A Member commented that the proposed gate on Footpath 24 would likely prove controversial with cyclists.
- The Senior Ranger noted that a quarter of the Common would be given over to grazing after expansion works had been completed.

9. OAK PROCESSIONARY MOTH

The Head Ranger was heard regarding Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) and the following points were made.

- The Head Ranger noted that there had been exponential expansion of OPM on Ashted Common with six nests in 2016, 16 in 2017, 244 in 2018, and an estimated 1000 nests expected in 2019. This rate of expansion had been a game changer in terms of how OPM was being managed by officers – the focus was now on removal of identified nests.
- In response to a question, the Head Ranger confirmed that OPM had an impact on veteran tree management, The City's veteran tree contractor was upskilling his team with view to improving the efficiency of their approach to OPM.

- The Head Ranger confirmed that nest removal was being prioritised in areas of public risk i.e. near footpaths.
- A Member noted his concern on the impact on staff of the requirement to identify and map the scale of OPM on the Common.

10. **RYE BROOK REED BED DESIGN**

The Head Ranger was heard regarding Rye Brook Reed Bed Design and the following points were made.

- The Head Ranger noted that the design proposal dated back to the November 2014 study of riverfly on the Common which had identified poor water quality. Mass water sampling had been conducted in Mach 2017 which had identified high levels of phosphate near the Ashted Estate Office. As a result, the City was looking to install a reed bed filtration system designed by the South East Rivers Trust. A Lidar map had been created which had identified some challenges such as buried infrastructure.
- The Head Ranger continued, noting that a longer system would cost £230k and up to £300k if contingency was included. It was likely that the project would require a partnership approach to secure grant funding e.g. with Thames Water and/or the Environment Agency.

11. **REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19 AND PRESENTATION OF THE 2019-20 PROGRAMME**

The Senior Ranger was heard regarding the Annual Work Programme 2018/19 and 2019/20 and the following points were made.

Annual Work Programme 2018/19

- 'District 10' of veteran tree management had been completed involving 85 trees re-trenched. 2000 volunteer hours had been provided on works to undertaken 'halo' release works. Specialist climbers had undertaken the works at higher levels and volunteers at lower levels. Some of the halo cuttings had been used to create eco-piles for insects and mammals.
- The upgrade of the Tow Bridges had been completed in August 2018.
- Surrey Wildlife Trust had grazed eight animals across five areas on the Common during May-September 2018.
- 250 Common Spotted orchids had been seen in the areas where scrub had been cleared by previous work programme works.
- Volunteering had been extremely successful, involving groups such as the Ashted Common Volunteers. A complete summer survey of migrant birds had been conducted.

- A Member welcomed the recent Lord Mayoral event for volunteers at Mansion House.
- The Senior Ranger added that two-thirds of bracken on the Phoenix field had been pulled by hand and the rest sprayed. Cattle grazing had helped to trample the bracken further, whilst other areas had been flail mown. Scrub clearance had been completed over winter.
- The Ashted Village Day on the Common had been an opportunity to launch the Common's 'vision' and to take the first comments on the 2021-2031 Plan.

Annual Work Programme 2019/20

- Veteran tree management works would commence on 'District 3'.
- The Phoenix grazing area would be extended to the western boundary, doubling the overall grazing area.
- Significant scrub clearance would be conducted across the lower slopes and woodland.
- Volunteering work and conservation work would continue to be celebrated.
- A major bat survey would be conducted to assess their impact on tree management.

12. QUESTIONS

Beetles

In response to a question, the Superintendent agreed that beetles could be looked at as part of planned surveys.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman noted that the Town Clerk would be in touch with Members to arrange the date and subject of the Summer 2019 walk.

The meeting ended at 8.23 pm

Chairman

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