

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE
Monday, 18 January 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held remotely
on Monday, 18 January 2021 at 11.30 am

Present

Members:

Graeme Doshi-Smith (Chairman)
Benjamin Murphy (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy Philip Woodhouse
Peter Bennett
Caroline Haines
Alderman Robert Howard
Jeremy Simons
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Verderer H.H William Kennedy
Verderer Paul Morris
Verderer Nicholas Munday

Officers:

Richard Holt	- Town Clerk's Department
Kerry Nicholls	- Town Clerk's Department
Kristina Drake	- Media Officer, Town Clerk's Department
Mark Jarvis	- Chamberlain Department
Edward Martin	- City Surveyor's Department
Colin Buttery	- Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	- Superintendent of Epping Forest
Andy Barnard	- Superintendent of The Commons
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Head of Visitor Services, Epping Forest
Jeremy Dagley	- Head of Conservation, Epping Forest
Jo Hurst	- Business Manager, Epping Forest
Tristian Vetta	- Senior Forrester Keeper, Epping Forest

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Alderman Robert Hughes-Penny.

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

There were no declarations received.

3. MINUTES

The Committee considered the draft public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee held on the 16th of November 2020. It was noted a declaration noted at the last meeting should be corrected.

The Chairman explained that the Deer Strategy mentioned in the minutes would be prepared for consideration by the Epping Forest Consultative Committee at its February meeting.

A Committee member noted that the previous meeting the Committee had lost quorum for non-Epping Forest related matters stating that this demonstrated the limitations on the Committee's constitution. In addition, it was questioned what work had been undertaken to avoid this happening in future. The Town Clerk responded by confirming that Commons and Epping Forest related business was ordered to be considered first at alternating Committee meetings in order that adequate time for considering these items was provided. Moreover, it was confirmed that the Committee had been given the opportunity to comment informally on Commons related business at the last meeting of the Committee before it was approved formally under urgency procedures.

Responding to query from a Committee member on paper copies of committee documents the Chairman and Town Clerk explained that the City of London Corporation was moving toward a paperless policy for committee documents, except for specific circumstances.

RESOLVED- That the public minutes of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee held on the 16th of November 2020, subject to the correction specified, be approved as an accurate record.

4. **DEPARTMENTAL AND SERVICE COMMITTEE BUDGET ESTIMATES 2021/22**

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Open Spaces and Chamberlain on the budget estimates for the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for 2021/22. The Chamberlain introduced the report and emphasised the saving proposals which had been actioned. The Director of Open Spaces highlighted the twelve percent savings required across the City of London Corporation and commented on the importance of starting the year with a balanced budget. The Chairman remarked that while the funding reduction was painful it was required and stated any works not completed in the Cyclical Works Programme in 2021 be planned for 2022.

Responding to a Committee member's query the Director of Open Spaces clarified that the Climate Action Strategy funding had been confirmed, with the majority of the open spaces allocated funds taking place at sites in Epping Forest and the Commons.

A Member highlighted the reduction in the budget for funding apprenticeships within the Open Spaces Department. The Director of Open Spaces explained that, despite the reduction in funding, the Department would still be bidding for central funding for apprentices. The Chairman suggested that the open spaces committee chairmen and deputy chairmen discuss this matter further and that a report be brought to the Committee for consideration.

The Chairman suggested that the Committee consider Item 8, the CWP Updated Bid Report, before reaching a decision on Item 4. The Committee agreed to consider the Item 8 before approving Item 4.

It was commented that it was important to know what risk there was of certain projects not being completed due to the reduced budget.

RESOLVED- That: -

- I. The Epping Forest proposed revenue budget for 2021/22 be approved for submission to the Finance Committee;
- II. The Commons proposed revenue budgets for 2021/22 be approved for submission to Finance Committee; and
- III. That the Epping Forest capital and supplementary revenue project budgets for 2021/22 be approved for submission to Finance Committee; and
- IV. That the Commons capital and supplementary revenue project budgets be approved for 2021/22 for submission to Finance Committee; and
- V. That the Chamberlain be authorised, in consultation with the Director of Open Spaces to revise these budgets to allow for any further implications arising from, Corporate Projects, the City's new Target Operating Model, and changes to the Cyclical Works Programme; and
- VI. That any minor amendments for 2020/21 and 2021/22 budgets arising during budget setting be delegated to the Chamberlain,

5. RESETTING OF DEPARTMENTAL BUDGETS 2020/21

The Committee noted a report of the Chamberlain on the Resetting of Departmental Budgets 2020/21. The Chamberlain highlighted that the overspend in the Epping Forest Budget had been reduced through effective mitigation by the Epping Forest Management Team. The Chairman commented that the value for money of the City of London Corporation managed open spaces had been demonstrated over the period effected by COVID and that the City of London Corporation were investing millions into their management. The Committee observed the huge increase of visitors to the Open Spaces and noted the vital contribution of staff at these sites.

Responding to a Committee member's comment the Chairman agreed that he and the Deputy Chairman were keen to look at more proactive communications on the matter of budgets in future. In addition, the Chairman agreed with a Member's suggestion that commitments be made to volunteers at the various open spaces as their contribution had been vital in the period effected by COVID.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

6. DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21 - SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE UPDATE: APRIL TO SEPT 2020

The Committee received a report of the Director of Open Spaces on the Departmental Business Plan 2020/21 Six month performance update: April to Sept 2020.

Responding to a query from the Deputy Chairman the Director of Open Spaces confirmed the Business plan had been produced without reference to the Target Operating Model and the Governance review as the outcome of these processes had yet to be realised.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

7. **OPEN SPACES DEPARTMENT BUSINESS PLAN FOR 2021/22**

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Open Spaces on the Open Spaces Department Business Plan for 2021/22.

A Committee member noted the increased number of visitors to the City of London Websites open spaces pages. The Chairman remarked that this demonstrated the ongoing requirement for a separate website for the City of London open spaces.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

8. **CWP 21/22 UPDATED BID REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the City Surveyor on the Cyclical Works Program (CWP) 21/22 Updated Bid Report. The report set out the details of projects which be undertaken in 2021/22 and details of the projects that will be delivered within that year which form part of the previous year's programmes. The City Surveyor explained that a new approach was scheduled for 2022/23.

Responding to the Chairman's query the City Surveyor explained that bids under ten thousand pounds would be automatically approved to allow these smaller historic bids to be approved efficiently.

The Chairman commented that a greater analysis of when the delayed works on the CWP would be actioned should be included. The Deputy Chairman added that details of whether the underlying issues had been resolved should be added also. The Committee discussed the need to include the delayed projects on the Risk Register going forward.

Responding to a question the City Surveyor confirmed that the figures for the works in the CWP were estimates not fixed with any underspend going into the CWP emergency budget.

RESOLVED- That the Committee noted the report.

9. **REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS**

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

The Director of Open Spaces provided an update on the London Borough of Waltham Forest Submission Local Plan and summarised the concerns of the City of London Corporation regarding the mitigation strategies in the Plan. A member of the Committee commented that the City of London Corporation needed to move quickly and publicly on this issue. A Committee member

agreed stating that the view of the Epping Forest Verderer's was to support the concerns summarised by the Director of Open Spaces. The Committee discussed that it was important to ensure Officers have the required power to act on these polices.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

10. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Open Spaces which provided a general update on issues across the nine sites within 'The Commons' division.

The Committee stated that it was deeply regrettable that there was deeply detrimental, and in certain instances irreversible, damage caused by the dramatically increased visitor numbers to the Commons sites. Responding to a query from the Deputy Chairman the Director of Open Spaces confirmed that measures to mitigate the effect of increased visitor numbers to the Commons sites would be considered. The Committee commented that the Government be informed, via all appropriate channels, of the effect the increased visitors were having on the Commons sites.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

11. **THE COMMONS - LICENCES, SPORTS, WAYLEAVES AND PRODUCE FEES AND CHARGES**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces on the Licences, sports, wayleaves and produce fees and charges for The Commons.

Responding to a Committee member's query the Director of Open Spaces confirmed that wider market pricing equivalents would be explored for future fees and charges benchmarking.

RESOLVED- That the proposed charges for 2021/22 be approved.

12. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Open Spaces which provided a summary of the Epping Forest Division's activities across October to November 2020. The Director of Open Spaces noted the significant difficulties which the Epping Forest Management Team had experienced in the October to November period with the considerable financial concerns and the increased visitor numbers to the Forest. The Chairman noted these difficulties and thanked Officers for their work.

Responding to question from the Deputy Chairman the Director of Open Spaces noted that the message to staff was well received and that various methods for thanking staff would be explored.

To reply to a Committee member's query the Director of Open Spaces confirmed that the casual keeper positions would be filled and that a senior

keeper was in the process of being hired. In addition, the contribution of the volunteers was highlighted.

RESOLVED- That the report be noted.

13. **EPPING FOREST CAR PARKING - TARIFF OPTIONS FOR INTRODUCED CHARGES (SEF 04/21)**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces on the Tariff Options for introduced charges for the Epping Forest Car Parking. The Chairman noted that further information on many of the details of the Epping Forest Car Parking would be provided after the public consultation had been completed.

The Committee debated the relative merits of Tariff Options B and C. It was suggested by a Member that, as the budget for managing the Forest was under pressure, Tariff Option C should be adopted as this provided the highest level of income. The Deputy Chairman explained that the Car Parking Charges are not only to increase income but also to manage visitor numbers. The Director of Open Spaces explained that after the approval of the Committee an extensive public consultation would begin in earnest. In addition, the Director of Open Spaces outlined the reasoning why Tariff Option B was recommended. The Chairman stated that he viewed Tariff Option B as the most appropriate as it allowed for suitable balance between securing valuable income but not making the costs of visiting the Forest prohibitive expensive. It was noted by a Committee member that the charges could be reviewed annually to allow for further consideration of the appropriate level of tariff. The Committee approved Tariff Option B with the condition that more detail be provided on differential charging options.

The Director of Open Spaces confirmed, in response to a query from a Member, that options for licensing professional dog walkers in the Forest were being explored.

RESOLVED- That the Committee approved Tariff Option B to be introduced with implementation of parking charges at Epping Forest.

14. **EPPING FOREST CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 2021-23 (SEF 02/21)**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces on the Epping Forest Consultative Committee Membership. The Chairman noted the difficulty in achieving appropriate representation on the Consultative Committee but stated that the report displayed a strong position regarding this matter.

RESOLVED- That the revision of the Consultative Committee Terms of Reference to allow greater clarity in the selection process be approved. This will require the current Consultative Committee to sit for one further meeting in its current form, before new appointments are made for the following three years.

15. **LICENCES, SPORTS, WAYLEAVES AND PRODUCE FEES AND CHARGES (SEF 03/21)**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces on the Licences, sports, wayleaves and produce fees and charges.

RESOLVED- That the proposed charges for 2021/22 as itemised in Appendix A and C, staff discounts and the continued subsidy for association football be approved.

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

There were no questions received in the public session.

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

No urgent business was considered in the public session.

18. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A (4) 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.

19. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

The Committee considered the non-public minutes of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee meeting held on the 16th of November 2020.

RESOLVED- That the non-public minutes of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee on the 16th of November be approved as an accurate record.

20. **RED COTTAGE, WOODREDON FARM AND HERDSPERSON'S ACCOMMODATION AT EPPING FOREST SEF 05/21)**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces on the Red Cottage, Woodredon Farm and Herdsperson's Accommodation at Epping Forest.

RESOLVED- That the report be approved.

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

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

22. **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.

The meeting ended at 2.05 pm

Chairman

Contact Officer: Richard Holt
Richard.Holt@cityoflondon.gov.uk