



West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons Consultation Group Draft Minutes

Tuesday 10th May 2022, 6.30pm

Members Present	Affiliation
Benjamin Murphy	Chairman
Graeme Doshi- Smith	Deputy Chairman
Richard Barnes	West Wickham Residents Association
Cllr Margaret Bird	Old Coulsdon Ward
Alaistair Carr	South London Harriers
Brian Hudson	Open Spaces Society
Cllr Zach Jones	Whyteleafe Village Council
Chantal Lane	Bromley Bridleways Access Group
Sarah Lovatt	New Hillbillies Volunteers
John	Representing Old Coulsdon Residents' Association
Richard Placek	Representing Riddlesdown Residents' Association
Jane McLaughlin	Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society
Avril Sleeman	British Horse Society
Members Absent	
Cllr Nicholas Bennett	West Wickham Ward
Liz Bonsall	Bourne Society
Alan Clifford	Old Coulsdon Residents Association
Peter Hodges	Hayes & Coney Hall Police Community Advisory Panel
Nicola Hunt	Croydon Conservation Volunteers
Malcolm Jennings	Association of Croydon Conservation Societies
Graham Lomas	Chair, Friends of Farthing Downs & ECRA
Brian Longman	Riddlesdown Residents' Association
Geoff Newton	West Wickham Police Community Advisory Panel
Cllr Neil Reddin	Hayes & Coney Hall Ward
Sue Short	Heartsease Girl Guides Association
Dr Ian Waite	Kenley & District Residents' association
Sam Wheatcroft	Wickham Common Residents' Association
Officers Present	
Andy Barnard	Assistant Director
Allan Cameron	Head Ranger
Barry Gutteridge	Senior Ranger
Helen Betteridge	Support Services officer

1. Welcome and Apologies

Chairman greeted the meeting. Apologies given.

2. Consultative Group Membership Review – Renewal of 4 Year Terms

The Assistant Director explained the Membership Review process and summarised the Consultative Group's Terms of Reference. The membership list for the renewal of 4-year terms was reviewed by the Head Ranger with the following result:

Name	Representing	Status
Graham Lomas	Chair, Friends of Farthing Downs & ECRA	Continue
Avril Sleeman	British Horse Society	Continue
Jane McLaughlin	Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society	Continue
Brian Hudson	Open Spaces Society	Continue
Brian Longman	Riddlesdown Residents Association	Continue
Alan Clifford	Old Coulsdon Residents Association	Continue
Geoff Newton	West Wickham Police Community Advisory Panel	Continue
Peter Hodges	Hayes & Coney Hall Police Community Advisory Panel	Continue
Sam Wheatcroft	Wickham Common Residents Association	Continue
Sarah Lovatt	New Hillbillies Volunteers	Continue
Chantal Lane	Bromley Bridleways Access Group	Continue
Liz Bonsall	Bourne Society	Continue
Alistair Carr	South London Harriers	Replaces Richard Carter
Richard Barnes	West Wickham Residents Association	Replaces Val Polydouro
Nicola Hunt	Croydon Conservation Volunteers	Replaces Phil Rathbone
Dr Ian Waite	Kenley & District Residents Association	To be removed no response or replacement
Sue Short	Heartsease Girl Guides Association	To be removed no response or replacement
Malcolm Jennings	Association of Croydon Conservation Societies	To be removed no response or replacement
Phil Rathbone	Croydon Conservation Volunteers	Replaced by Nicola Hunt
Richard Carter	South London Harriers	Replaced by Alistair Carr
Val Polydouro	West Wickham Residents Association	Replaced by Richard Barnes

New Members – No new members reported Head Ranger will report on any new members at the meeting on the 8th October

3. Minutes / Actions Undertaken

In response to a member's question regarding the feasibility of providing café/ refreshment facilities on Riddlesdown- the Head Ranger explained how there had been a project over the winter to establish a mobile facility and a suitable operator was selected and heads of terms created but the operator has since made no contact. A similar opportunity could potentially exist on other sites and this will be explored over the coming months.

In response to a member's question relating to reinstating the pond on West Wickham Common, the Head Ranger reported that after carrying out preliminary exploration it was found that the soil and underlying geology were not conducive to water retention and that any artificial pond creation would be both time consuming and costly.

Minutes of the last meeting agreed.

4. Assistant Director's Update

Target Operating Model (TOM) is a review of the structure and governance across the City of London Corporation.

Changes to the Open Spaces Dept.

Director Colin Buttery retired in Autumn 2021. An interim Director has been appointed. The Open Spaces Department has joined with other City Departments to become the Environment Department - Executive Director Environment Juliemma McLoughlin. The Open Spaces Dept is now the '**Natural Environment Division**'. Under the new structure 'Superintendents' are now referred to as '**Assistant Directors**.'

A two phased approach is underway to set the structure of the new Natural Environment Division. The Commons is in Phase 1 and some relatively minor changes are now at the staff consultation stage including the deletion of vacant posts, amendments to Line Manager responsibilities and the strengthening of Ranger and Ecological teams. Savings accrued will help support recent budget cuts.

Five Year Development Plan

A 5-year plan is being produced by the Natural Environment Division and will be finalised once all divisional changes under Phase 2 have taken place later in 2022. Reviews of charitable governance and activities will also form an important part of the 5-year plan.

City of London Apprenticeship Scheme

Two additional Apprentice Rangers currently in place for 18 months at Coulsdon Common and Burnham Beeches. Other apprenticeships are being considered to support the fulltime teams and encourage new careers in environmental management.

A member asked for licences to be defined. Chargeable licences are issued for business activities on The Commons such as commercial filming, access to railways for maintenance works etc.

5. Management Planning

The Head Ranger reported that in addition to the management plan for West Wickham and Spring Park, completed in 2021, four further plans for the Coulsdon Commons are now complete. These new ten-year plans (2021-2031) complement the suite of revised plans across the division and bring to an end this current phase of rewriting across the division. Analysis of data from the consultation exercise, including age cohorts, reasons for visits and approval of site visions followed; as well as reflections on both pre and post Covid -19 visitor numbers.

Discussion took place over the accuracy of the age profile responding to the management plan survey. Coulsdon Common revealed a younger age group of users.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions City of London face to face consultation with the public was prohibited as would be the normal procedure; survey was conducted using an online system with good response.

Chairman would like to see copies of survey and plans available on the website in addition to emailed copies and hard copies which are available from the Estate Office on request.

Action 1: The Commons team to look at making management plans accessible online.

6. Countryside Stewardship

The Head Ranger reported that the application for continued funding from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) had been successful. A Countryside Stewardship agreement, which will see funding at or equivalent to the previous Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) commenced in January 2022 and will run for a further 4 years. However, a year-on-year percentage reduction in the Basic Payments Scheme (BPS) will see an overall net loss of £19,000 between now and 2027. As part of the new scheme, we are required to establish an evidence-based monitor and review system to record the habitat management work across our sites.

Grassland – continue the maintenance of species-rich chalk grassland habitats through grazing and hay-cutting that satisfies prescription from Natural England and enhances and enriches biodiversity across all sites.

Scrub - control scrub to create and maintain open downland landscape focusing on chemical-free “tree-popping”. This facilitates larger grazing areas and enhances the mosaic of grassland habitats across the sites.

Hedgerows- Capital Payment for laying on FD & SP and for allowing development of fruit on 3-year rotation.

Chairman recognised that the team work hard to bring in money from countryside stewardship to support works on the Commons.

Member advised that funding can be claimed under The Nature Recovery Network in 2024 for woodland providing use does not change. CoL aware and have already explored.

7. Dog Waste

The Head Ranger appraised the group of the most recent costs associated with the provision of dog waste facilities across the sites; £26,000 pa for collection and disposal plus

an additional £9,000 for the provision of dog bags. In a typical year more than 500,000 dog bags are provided on sites at West Wickham and Coulsdon

A mini project, led by the ranger for Kenley Common, will trial the removal of the provision of dog bags on one site (the bins and collections will remain) in a bid to reduce costs and encourage users to provide their own when visiting the site. A campaign to communicate this trial will begin in early June and will include the use of social media and ranger led information activities. It is the case that very few sites provide dog bags anymore and our continued provision should be regarded as a luxury, especially when set against the backdrop of recent budget cuts.

A member was concerned that dog waste/bags are going to landfill and take time to biodegrade. Head Ranger advised that all dog waste collected goes to an energy recovery facility in Bognor Regis to produce electricity.

8. Car Parks Project

The Head Ranger updated members on the car park charging project one year on.

In January 2021, car park charging was introduced on Riddlesdown and Farthing Downs. The system uses automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) and payments can be made with either a bank card (including contactless) or via a smartphone app (RingGo). So far, the system is proving to be effective and although we did not achieve our financial targets in 2021/22, we remain optimistic that this steady flow of income will help us to continue providing essential services. Between January 2021 and January 2022 Riddlesdown car park generated £10,114 and Farthing Downs £40,282 of income for The Commons. As well as generating much needed income to balance the budgets following the recent 12% cuts, the Head Ranger explained other impacts and benefits following the introduction of charging, these included:

- Reduction in the unsustainable levels of visitor numbers witnessed during both phases of the Covid-19 pandemic
- More responsible use of the sites associated with a “willingness to pay” principle
- Reduction in anti-social behaviour- drug use / vandalism / late night revellers as a function of ANPR cameras in operation
- Reduction in litter - linked partly to the point regarding more responsible use of the site
- Reduction in dog waste- (1 bin already removed at Riddlesdown) - we have noticed a reduction in professional dog walkers coming to both sites.
- Late night closing issues where rangers have encountered anti-social and sometimes threatening behaviour when trying to close the car parks.

Members living close to Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown said there had been an increase in parking in local roads possibly due to introduction of car parking charges.

Assistant Director is happy to work with residents but will require evidence to raise this with the local authority responsible for parking on the highways.

Action 2: Groups members to provide evidence to the Assistant Director that the increase in parking in local roads is attributable to the introduction of car parking charges.

A member asked how much income City of London raised from parking and PCNs (Penalty Charge Notices). Head Ranger advised that the City of London only receives money from parking charges; income from PCNs goes directly to the enforcement company.

Action 3: Head Ranger to provide information showing how the income raised from car parking has funded works on the Commons.

9. Review of the Annual Works programme 2021 -22

The Senior Ranger informed the group that the ranger team had continued to deliver the annual work programme over the past twelve months including laying hedgerows at Farthing Downs and Spring Park, supporting “no mow May” by leaving verges uncut for wildflowers, installing a temporary fence to protect ground nesting skylarks on Farthing Downs, and installing a new windmill history board on Coulsdon Common. Partnership working included the relaunch of the Farthing Downs & happy Valley Nature Trail, led by Croydon Council, and City of London sheep grazing London Wildlife Trust’s nature reserve on Riddlesdown.

The guided walks and events programme had relaunched across the Commons and was proving very popular. Green Flag Awards had been retained across all six sites and Green Heritage plaques had been awarded, including a first-time plaque for Coulsdon Common.

Ash dieback continued to have a significant impact on the wooded landscape with many diseased trees felled through the year. Winter storms brought down dozens of trees creating a significant extra workload for the team and specialist contractors. Planned tree safety work had also been completed following condition assessments along boundaries and major internal routes.

17 lambs and 16 calves arrived in spring and have been growing fast. A new Pedigree Sussex bull has been purchased. He was named Ferdinand at the *Meet the Calves* event. Conservation grazing continued across the Coulsdon Commons in line with Countryside Stewardship prescriptions.

Volunteers achieved over 2,400 hours of work through the year and plenty of new faces have joined the established teams. Monthly weekday tasks take place on all Commons and monthly weekend tasks revolve around the Coulsdon Commons.

A member mentioned that there were several residents voluntarily collecting litter on Farthing Downs. The Head Ranger thanked them for their assistance along with all the volunteers across The Commons.

10. Any other business

The Chairman re-emphasised the purpose of this consultative group was to gather input from local stakeholders on business coming before the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for decision. It also an opportunity for local stakeholders to share ideas or ask for updates on specific matters. He encouraged members to think about this and feedback anything they wished to know more about prior to the next meeting to the Assistant Director.

Action 4: Group members to advise Assistant Director of any matters, within a reasonable timescale, in advance of future meetings.

Date of Next Meeting. 8th October 2022

The meeting closed at 8.03pm

