



Ashtead Common Consultative Group Draft Minutes

Wednesday 25th May 2022, 6.30pm

Members Present	Affiliation
Benjamin Murphy	Chairman
David Baker	Ashtead Residents' Association
Cllr David Hawksworth	Mole Valley District Council
Paul Krause	Surrey Wildlife Trust
Averill Laing	Ashtead Common Volunteers
Keith Lelliott	Science Monitoring of the Rye & Ashtead Common Wildlife
Cllr Chris Townsend	Surrey County Council
Officers Present	
Andy Barnard	Assistant Director
Andrew Thwaites	Head Ranger
Shaun Waddell	Senior Ranger
Helen Betteridge	Support Services Officer

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

Chairman thanked those present for their attendance and gave an overview of the changes which had given place since the City elections, including the change of Chairman.

Apologies were received as below:

Graeme Doshi- Smith	Deputy Chairman
Rob Eberhard	Cyclists Touring Club
James Irvine	Ashtead Volunteers
Conor Morrow	Lower Mole Project
Pippa Woodall	British Horse Society

2. **Members' declarations under the code of conduct in respect of items on the agenda**

There were no declarations made.

3. **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
David Baker	Ashtead Residents' Association	Continue
Paul Krause	Surrey Wildlife Trust	Continue

Keith Lelliott	Science Monitoring of the Rye & Ashtead Common Wildlife	Continue
David Baker	Ashtead Residents' Association	Continue
		Continue
Rob Eberhard	Cyclists Touring Club	Continue
James Irvine	Ashtead Volunteers	Replaced by Averill Laing
Conor Morrow	Lower Mole Project	Continue
Gary Nash	Youth and Community Worker at Ashtead Youth Centre/Surrey County Council	Continue
Pippa Woodall	British Horse Society	Continue

New Members – Averill Laing has taken over from James Irvine as the representative for the Ashtead Volunteers. The Chairman and other members thanked Mr. Irvine for his long service and contribution to the Ashtead Common Consultative Group. The Chairman would write and convey this formally.

The Chairman also thanked the willing volunteers for their commitment in time and energy to support the works on the Common. He reemphasised the fact that the charity would not be able to operate without such generosity of spirit.

4. **Minutes / Actions Undertaken**

- The Assistant Director confirmed that a dog code leaflet had been produced, tying in with Ashtead Common Byelaws, to remind users of their responsibilities when using the Common.
- Oak processionary moth was noted as not being such an issue in 2021/22 as it had been in previous years.
- The framework and campaign to facilitate donations by the public to help fund projects remains 'a work in progress' for the management team.
- An article promoting Ashtead Common appeared in the 'Look Local' magazine.

Minutes of the last meeting agreed.

5. **Assistant Director's Update**

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

Changes to the Open Spaces Department

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 for which the Executive Director of Environment is Juliemma McLoughlin.

The Open Spaces Dept is now the '**Natural Environment Division**' to better reflect the service provision. Under the new structure 'Superintendents' are now rebranded as 'Assistant Directors', to drive standardisation in roles and responsibilities across the department.

The TOM review is being conducted in 2 phases. The Commons structure was completed as Phase 1 and included 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 created 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, as will key strategic objectives which run across the department.

City of London Apprenticeship Scheme

2 additional Apprentice Rangers are currently in place for 18 months at Coulsdon Common and Burnham Beeches. A third apprentice position is soon to be recruited for Ashtead Common to support the fulltime team.

Income Generation

Given a sustained period of cost increases and budget reductions, The Commons charities will generate a commercial strategy to help support operations. A member asked if the fact that Ashtead Common has limited opportunities to produce income compared to the other Commons sites was the cause of any friction. The Assistant Director advised that Ashtead is set up as more of a community run space with a smaller budget. Further, it is accepted that without car parks, cafes and other infrastructure the opportunities for Ashtead Common to generate income are very limited, so no, there is no friction. The Chairman explained that the commercial strategy should consider areas where there charities could help support themselves, but there was still an ongoing commitment from the City of London Corporation to provide funding for these sites.

With regard to the car parking charges introduced at other sites across The Commons a member asked if the City of London Corporation enforced penalties for visitors that try and avoid paying. The Assistant Director explained that an independent enforcement company issued any Penalty Charge Notices, and that the business model meant that most of that part of the income stream goes to the company. However, enforcement was active.

6. Review of the Annual Works programme 2021 -22

The Head Ranger and the Senior Ranger presented a review of the annual works programme for 2021 – 22 and a look forward at future projects.

As part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Ashtead Common has been designated a Queen's Green Canopy 'Ancient Woodland', one of only 70 woodlands across the UK to be granted this distinction. The Head Ranger explained that this honour is not only a recognition of the quality of the nature reserve, but also a reflection of the value given to community involvement.

The Head Ranger explained that the City Corporation has signed a 10-year agreement with Natural England under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. Funding is provided for the Common as a whole, including the part owned by Mole Valley District Council.

The City Corporation aims to offset its carbon emissions by 2027. One of 10 projects launched under this initiative is looking at carbon removals, and all the City's green spaces have been analysed as part of this. Ashtead Common has been found to sequester 60,293

tons of carbon but presents little opportunity to do more than this if we are to continue to maintain the sites high biodiversity value.

The carbon removals study has considered the impact of operational activities such as felling trees and clearing and burning scrub. It has concluded that 'the benefits for biodiversity outweigh these losses in carbon.'

The Head Ranger summarised the survey work that had been undertaken since the last meeting. A study of bats, conducted by a ranger as part of her M.res studies, identified eight species. Results of a year-long study of flies are still not finalised, but already nearly 1,000 species have been identified. Studies of fungi and ferns are planned for later in the year.

Grazing recommenced in May with 10 Belted Galloway cattle supplied by Surrey Wildlife Trust. The Birch/Aspen grazing area has been enlarged by 3.1ha in accordance with management plan objectives.

Another management plan objective will see the creation of a dog exclusion area within one pond. An area of the pond will still be left open for dogs, but it is hoped that the excluded area will colonise with aquatic life when disturbance is reduced.

The Senior Ranger was pleased to announce that 6,000 hours of volunteering was achieved during 2021-22. This figure is back up to pre covid levels and above the management plan target. Volunteer activity included the creation of a new firebreak on the western boundary and a coppicing 'mega task' near Bridleway 38 run in conjunction with neighbouring volunteer groups.

The Senior Ranger reported that our first Apprentice has successfully completed her 18-month placement and is now actively seeking a full-time post as a Ranger.

Forty ancient oak pollards were cut and 110 were halo released in District Seven. Looking ahead, the same numbers are predicted for 2022-23 in District Four.

Work to create a new firebreak encompassing part of Footpath 24 will commence in the autumn/winter.

The Senior Ranger is looking forward to a new Assistant Ranger and second Apprentice Ranger joining the team later in the year.

7. Questions on matters relating to the work of the Consultative Group

A member asked if the City of London Corporation shares expertise across its Open Spaces, referring particularly to ecologists at Epping Forest. The Chairman confirmed that it did, however, collaboration and cross-pollination of specialisms was a key outcome expected from the TOM. He explained that there is likely to be individual committee members and volunteers aligned to the advancement and delivery of specific strategies going forward.

A member noted that over promoting carbon sequestration could detract from the other needs of the Common. The importance of Ashted Common's ecosystem services should be promoted to local residents.

A member questioned whether the proposed ponds are big enough to create an exclusion zone. The Head Ranger advised that there would be a trial pond which would be evaluated and then rolled out if it proved successful.

Several members were interested in the rejigging of the cutting of the meadows. Head Ranger will arrange a meeting with the interested parties.

Action 1. Promotion of ecosystem services. Head Ranger to promote the importance of these services to our visitors.

Action 2: Cutting of Meadows. Head Ranger to arrange meeting soon with interested members.

A member enquired if Ashtead Common was experiencing any problems with box caterpillars which are causing widespread problems. It was confirmed that there are no problems as Ashtead Common has no box plants.

It was commented that Ashtead Common team taking over the grassland to the north of the railway line was a good thing and warmly welcomed.

A member asked if there were any problems experienced with regeneration after the coppicing due to deer; the Senior Ranger advised that there had been nothing of note.

It was mentioned that many migratory birds had been enjoying the Common.

Finally, it was noted that there was a large amount of scrub that needs clearing which would be a task for volunteer groups.

Action 3. Scrub Clearance work to be included in the forthcoming volunteers' work programme.

8. **Any other business**

The Chairman re-emphasised that 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 is 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. Site visit 24th September 2022 at 14:00.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm

