

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MITCHAM COMMON CONSERVATORS
(A Statutory Corporation constituted by the Metropolitan Commons
(Mitcham) Supplemental Act 1891)
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 5th DECEMBER 2018 AT 6.30PM

Present:

Mr R. Bailey (Vice Chairman)
Mr. J. Cheetham
Ms. A. Dines
Cllr. N. Draper (Chairman)
Mr. M. Groves
Cllr. S. King
Cllr M. Mansell
Cllr. A. Mundy
Cllr. R. Makin (present from 7pm)

In Attendance:

Mr. M. Boyle – Manager of Mitcham Common
Mr. P. Moorhouse - Warden
Mr. D. Napier - Leisure & Culture Greenspaces Manager, Merton
Mr. R. Auld - Investment Manager, Redmayne Bentley
Ms. M. Nunzet - Friends of Mitcham Common (present for Part 1)
Mr J. Beaumont- Friends of Mitcham Common (present for Part 1)
Ms. L. Sherwood - Friends of Mitcham Common (present for Part 1)
Ms. L. Parry – Minute taker

Absent:

Cllr. J. Campbell
Ms A. Fairweather
Cllr. N. Garratt
Cllr. C. Williams

1. Apologies for Absence

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr J. Campbell, Ms. A. Fairweather and Cllr C. Williams. Apologies had also been received from the Mitcham Golf Club Trustees who had intended to send a representative.

As there were some spaces free round the table and only three Friends present to observe the meeting, the Chairman invited Melanie, John and Liz to join Conservators at the table.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were asked if they had any declarations of interest. None were declared at the outset of the meeting.

3. Minutes of the last Meeting Held on 26th September 2018

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true reflection of the meeting and were duly signed and dated by the Chairman.

4. Matters Arising

- **Parking on Croydon Road Shared Path:** The problem of illegal parking had been raised with the new Head of Parking for Merton. The concerns of Conservators had also been strongly backed up by the local Councillor Martin Whelton. This issue will continue to be monitored.
- **Fly grazing on the Common:** The Manager reported that the horses had been removed by the owner.
- **De-stocking of the Ponds:** Following discussion at the previous meeting the Friends had consulted their membership and 57% of respondents had been in favour of destocking the ponds. The Manager therefore suggested that Conservators may wish to consider a resolution to destock One Island Pond and Seven Islands Pond.

John Beaumont, Friends of Mitcham Common, asked if consideration could be given to moving fish to another location such as Three Kings? The Manager and Conservators explained that there were very robust regulations around stocking and movement of fish and this would not be ecologically sound nor legally permitted.

Conservators agreed unanimously that the ponds should be destocked. The Chairman made the point that whilst de-stocking would remove the majority of fish, it was never possible to completely remove all fish.

RESOLVED: Manager to contact the Environment Agency and make arrangements for a contractor to remove the fish in accordance with legislation.

- **Planning for Red house Road.** At the previous meeting Cllr Williams had been asked to follow up on the latest information about Red house Road. Cllr Williams had provided the following report: *'Planning Officers issued a screening opinion in May concluding that an Environmental Statement would not be required for the redevelopment of the site for the demolition of all existing buildings and the construction of a warehouse building with ancillary offices to the first floor on its eastern side comprising 7,636 sq.m of employment floor space (7,120 sq.m B8 plus 516 sq.m ancillary B1 use) together with 110 parking spaces, LGV/HGV loading bays and landscaping.'*

The Planning Officer confirmed that to date the Planning department has not received any formal planning application in regard to this proposed development or any other applications regarding the redevelopment of this site since the Screening Opinion was issued in May.

- **Barbecues in Merton Greenspaces.** The Chairman reported that LB Merton was not agreeing a policy on barbecues at this stage. With regard to management of bins on the Common, the Chairman said that he would like this to be a future agenda item but before doing so he would like to receive an anticipated report from Keep Britain Tidy regarding a pilot project in Wandle Park.

- **Bench memorial plaque.** The Manager reported that following consultation and discussion the Friends had agreed an arrangement which met the needs of all parties. The Friends had also requested that the Conservators have a policy so that any future requests for memorial benches can be clearly managed. As a result, three potential sites have been identified on the Common for location of benches, and these will be the only sites available for new benches until such time as extant benches need to be replaced.

RESOLVED: A policy agreed for any future requested for memorial benches.

5. **Administration and Management Report**

- **Acid Grassland Restoration Project**

The Manager reported that since the last meeting he had received a response from Lorraine Craig, Trustee Mitcham Golf Club confirming that the Trustees have no objection to the project going ahead. The Friends had also indicated their support. The next stage would be to identify possible external funding sources, noting that Conservators would need to agree to pay 10% of project costs under the terms of some funding bids. The following resolution was agreed:

RESOLVED: Conservators authorised contribution costs of up to £4,000. The Manager to seek appropriate project funding streams. Update to be reported in March 2019

- **High Court Injunction Order**

At the last meeting the Chair advised that both Merton and Sutton Council's would be seeking Injunction Orders against *'persons unknown occupying land and/or depositing waste on land'*.

It is intended that these would be borough wide and include all Council-owned public open spaces. The Board agreed that both Merton and Sutton should be asked to include Mitcham Common in the land parcels covered by the injunctions.

In October the Chairman sent a letter to Sutton confirming that they are authorized to act on behalf of the Mitcham Common Conservators with regard to including Mill Green within the land covered by the injunction.

On 7th November 2018 Sutton went to the High Court and was granted a three years Injunction Order. It is anticipated that Merton will seek a similar injunction sometime in the future. The Chairman said that it was hoped this would be before Christmas.

At the end of November the Chairman sent a letter to Merton confirming that they are authorized to act on behalf of the Mitcham Common Conservators with regard to including Mitcham Common within the land covered by the injunction.

RESOLVED: Conservators formally approved action taken to date with thanks to the Manager and Chairman.

5a **Croydon Road Pedestrian Phase**

Conservators had been provided with notes of the site meeting held on Monday 7th November 2018

to look at the specific requirements for the creation of the Croydon Road Pedestrian Phase. The Manager took Conservators through these illustrating the areas referred to on an updated plan/scheme. There were five key areas discussed:

1. East Side of Windmill Road: The original plan included taking a small slither of common land which may have an impact on the roots of trees growing adjacent to the path. The updated plan showed no landtake. However the re-surfacing of the existing footpath might still impact on tree roots. Accordingly a tree root protection plan will be required.

2. Croydon Road junction with Windmill Rd: The original plan included removal of common land, which is now not required on the updated plan.

3. South side of Croydon Road: No change from the original plan

4. West side of Windmill Road and junction with Croydon Rd: The plan remains much the same. A CAVAT tree report had been completed. Members re-iterated their agreement that a path leading onto the Common was necessary though the exact route was yet to be determined.

5. Cross over onto the golf course: The plan no longer includes a dropped kerb. During the site visit members had questioned the purpose of the path and the project officer had said this was to protect encroachment by HGVs. The Conservators re-iterated their view that this section of path should be removed and a bund and/or bell bollards installed.

John Beaumont, Friends of Mitcham Common, asked about the area at the edge of the bus stop (South side of Croydon Rd), noting that there was a ditch nearby and he queried whether this was dangerous. He asked if a hedgerow was proposed. The Manager explained that a hedgerow was not planned, but gave assurance that all works undergo a safety audit.

RESOLVED: Conservators formally approved the go ahead of the Croydon Road Pedestrian Phase, subject to a licence agreement between Merton Council and the Mitcham Common Conservators.

6. Friends of Mitcham Common -To report on recent activities and to raise any relevant matters

Melanie Nunzet gave the following report:

1) Seven Islands Pond – Fish destocking survey

Further to the update given by the Manager under Matters Arising, Melanie gave more detail about the consultation process:

An email had been sent to the Friends (text below) and results had been collated.

In recent months the Manager of Mitcham Common has received some complaints relating to people fishing on Seven Islands Pond. These include littering, overnight camps, campfires and antisocial behaviour. The Conservators are seeking the Friends' opinion regarding the destocking of the pond which has been done in the past.

We have prepared a very simple survey (for you to take part in if you would like to give your views. Your response will be completely anonymous. We will collate the replies for forwarding to the Manager and will let you know the results in due course. Please vote by the end of November to guarantee your vote will be counted.

Poll question

The manager of Mitcham Common is seeking input from the Friends of Mitcham Common.

Should the fish be safely removed from Seven Islands Pond and relocated elsewhere?

- Yes 57% (44 votes)
- No 32% (25 votes)
- No opinion either way 10% (8 votes)

2) Acid Grassland and Heathland Restoration Project

As noted under Matters Arising it was noted that The Friends' Committee supports this project. The Friends would like to see future proposals coming forward from the Conservators in the context of a revised and updated Management Plan.

3) Update on bench by Seven Islands Pond for Susan Crawford

As noted under Matters Arising the Friends resolved the request for a bench. This had been done by allowing Susan to use the other side of an already existing Friends' bench for a plaque in memory of her husband. She has engaged a carpenter to fix the plaque in place and this should happen sometime in December. As the footpath use has now changed to the other side of the



bench the plaque will be clearly visible to passers-by.

4) Wandle Vistas project – winner of a Landscape Institute Award

Conservators were provided with 'Wandle Vistas: A Guide to Views in The Wandle Valley' The Friends would like to recognize the achievement of Joyce Bellamy, long standing member of the Friends, who was the instigator of this project. Through community consultation, a long list of views was honed down to a top 10 that tell the story of the Wandle Valley's development. One of these viewpoints is the mound east of Seven Islands Pond which has significant Wandle Valley landmarks on the horizon.

The project was led by landscape consultants, Untitled Practice and Fiona Fyfe Associates, with guidance from the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust, Wandle Valley Forum and Greater London Authority. It has recently won a prestigious Landscape Institute award.

A number of Questions for the Conservators from Friends were posed:

Friends had received the following from Pippa Maslin (Merton Green Party) asking for comments.

"One thing that I have picked up on whilst getting to grips with the 2019 application is that Mitcham Common (specifically, a space near Mill House Ecology Centre) is being considered as a venue for music festivals of a similar nature. Like Cllr Alambritis, Cllr Draper is keen to - to quote Alambritis - 'sweat assets' like our green spaces."

(1) In order for us to respond and consult with the Friends we would like to hear the current views of the Conservators on using the Common for public events.

Answer: The Chairman explained that Conservators had resolved at the previous meeting to explore the possibility of using parts of the Common for events. The rationale for this is to bring in income so that Conservators can continue to manage the stewardship of the Common effectively in forthcoming years. The Common has traditionally relied on three main funding streams

1. Council funding: There is currently only one Council still providing funding, and this is vulnerable going forwards.
2. Golf Club licence: The Golf Club is not a significantly profitable concern. The Conservators have agreed not to raise fees in line with market rate to support the club, but it is still vulnerable and cannot be relied upon as an assured future source of funding.
3. Investments: The Conservators have a well managed medium risk portfolio but the level of income is always uncertain particularly in uncertain financial and political climates.

In this context it is incumbent upon Conservators to find other sources of income to assure the future management of the Common.

The Chairman explained that there were three areas of the Common being considered for events; he showed these on the map. The majority of the Common was completely out of bounds for such events because of its ecological importance. The three areas being considered were the least environmentally sensitive areas. The Fairsite is already used for a number of annual events and it is hoped to attract more in the future. The area behind Mill House is being proposed for holding music festival events. The third area, Mill Green, is much smaller and would be proposed for community events.

Conservators do not themselves have the experience or expertise to organise such events, so they would work with Merton's Greenspaces Team and Facilities Management Team, with the idea of developing a shared funding arrangement. The specifics relating to any proposed events would be

evaluated and included within the terms of the licence agreement and carefully considered to ensure health and safety and be mindful of the impact on local residents.

(2) We are trying to recruit more volunteers by spreading the word about the Friends but in view of the current anti-signage policy we would like to ask the Conservators how they would suggest we engage with the public if we are not permitted to display notices on the Common.

Answer: The Manager and Conservators agreed that they were happy for the Friends to put up laminated signage for a designated period (eg two months) with the proviso and agreement that the signs are taken down at the end of this time.

John Beaumont, Friends of Mitcham Common, said that he would like to see a more proactive approach from the Conservators in supporting the Friends in their recruitment campaign. There was then discussion about the importance of maintaining the separateness of the two organisations and the Chairman stated that it would be wrong for Conservators to take on responsibilities or make decisions for the Friends. Conservators said that they were happy to give support where appropriate and possible. It was agreed that an article could be placed in the Merton and Sutton Council magazines requesting active volunteers. The Chairman confirmed that he had spoken to Ward Councillors in Cricket Green, Pollards Hill and Longthornton to ask if they or any of their contacts were interested in becoming active volunteers.

RESOLVED: Friends to liaise with Cllr Nick Draper with copy they would like published in the Merton and Sutton magazines.

(3) Regarding the Wandle Vistas project we would welcome your views on how to recognise the key vista on the Common and protect it. The Friends would be happy to collaborate on this.

Answer: Conservators did not have any specific ideas concerning protection of a view because they considered that many factors were not within their control. Nevertheless they would be happy to consider any suggestions if the Friends raised them.

(4) Prologis distribution centre and Suez waste recycling facility proposals on Beddington Lane. Will the Conservators express their views to ensure lorry access is not via Beddington Lane and the Mitcham Common crossroads but rather via Therapia Lane?

Answer: Cllr Makin was aware of this development and agreed to discuss the matter of vehicle movements with Merton officers.

(5) Hackbridge Station – will the Conservators express their views to ensure this development does not create further visual intrusion on the Common.

Answer: The Conservators will not be commenting on this development

The Magpie Issue 98 The latest edition was circulated for Conservators. It was noted that the fungal foray walk on 10th November had been very interesting. The edition included a strong plea for additional membership of people willing to take an active role.

At the conclusion to this item the Chairman extended the Conservators' continued thanks to the Friends for their work and care for the Common which was very much appreciated.

7. Income and Expenditure (Until end of November 2018)

Conservators were in receipt of the Income and Expenditure Report. Conservators did not have any queries or comments and formally approved the report.

Liz Sherwood, Friends of Mitcham Common, asked for clarification on what the budget line 'suppliers and services' refers to. The Manager explained that this is service costs for management of the Common. The Chairman offered to provide a breakdown of the expenditure outside the meeting if required.

RESOLVED: Income and Expenditure Report formally accepted

8. Investments: Portfolio Valuation

Conservators were in receipt of the latest Investment portfolio. Richard Auld gave an update on the performance of the portfolio and confirmed that at the present time he was very satisfied with the spread of investments. In the current very uncertain climate he was as confident as it was possible to be that the portfolio would weather whatever outcomes arose with Brexit, impact of the Italian banking crisis.

Richard made the following recommendation for Conservators' consideration: To sell the holding in Verizon and purchase a new holding The North American Trust, for the following reasons:

1. Richard said he was nervous of holding foreign direct equities, as there is not the same access to research and there is no diversification in one holding.
2. Richard was also concerned that the US market is entering another phase of increased competition. Recent numbers were flattered by a change in corporate tax and a change in accounting methods. He said he would prefer as in the past to have overseas exposure via collectives. Richard recommended switching the proceeds in to The North American Trust. A high quality fund with a great long term record. It will mean a slight reduction in income but well worth it to gain the diversification.

The Conservators fully supported this recommendation.

Q: During the last recession many securities were over valued. Are the Conservators' funds exposed in any way should there be another recession?

A: All banks have taken dramatic steps since that time and are in a much stronger position. There will not be anything of the scale previously seen and UK exposure is minimal.

At the conclusion to discussion of this item the Chairman thanked Richard Auld for his expert advice and attendance at the current meeting.

RESOLVED: Conservators authorised selling the holding in Verizon and putting the proceeds in the North American Trust.

9 **Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust**

Mr. J. Cheetham reported that the meeting scheduled for 17th October had been cancelled. The next meeting was due to take place on the following day, 6th December. The current CEO has given notice of her retirement and a new appointment will be made in 2019.

10. **Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 13 March 2019**

11. **Any Other Business**

The Manager reported that Trustees of the Golf Club had reported concerns about pipework coming from an area behind the carwash. The area around this is sodden and there is concern about whether this was caused by wastewater from a toilet. The Manager said that he was minded to contact Environmental Health to report a concern. This was fully supported by Conservators.

RESOLVED: Manager to have a further discussion with Mitcham Golf Club with a view to asking Merton's Environmental Health Team to investigate the water coming from pipe behind carwash. Update at next meeting.

At the conclusion to this item the public part of the meeting was closed and the Friends left the meeting.

Nh
13/03/19