

Minutes of the Meeting of the Mitcham Common Conservators

Held on Wednesday 7th December 2016 at 6.30pm

At the Mill House Ecology Centre, Windmill Road, Mitcham

Present:

Mr. J. Cheetham
Cllr. T. Godfrey (Chairman)
Mr. M. Groves
Cllr. J. Henry
Cllr. S. King
Cllr. R. Makin
Cllr M. Mansell
Mr. D. Mobsby MBE (Vice Chairman)
Cllr. I. Munn
Cllr. C. Williams

In Attendance:

Mr. R. Auld - Investment Manager
Mr. M. Boyle – Manager of Mitcham Common
Mr. P. Moorhouse – Warden of Mitcham Common
Mr. D. Napier - Leisure & Culture Greenspaces Manager Merton
Mr. D. Stillwell – Acting Chair, Friends of Mitcham Common (Present for Part 1)
Mr P. Miles - Merton Council Traffic Engineer
Ms. L. Parry – Minute taker

Absent:

Mr. R Bailey
Dr. D. Coleman
Ms. J. Russell

1. Apologies for Absence

The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.30pm and welcomed everyone. Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Bailey and Dr Coleman

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chair asked Conservators if they had any declarations of interest which could be a conflict in the current agenda and none were declared.

3. Minutes of the last Meeting Held on 28th September 2016

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate account of proceedings and were signed by the Chairman.

4. Matters Arising

Ravensbury Arms: The Manager reported that the fly tip had now been cleared and the owners of the site had been very helpful. A new planning application has been submitted during the past week which relates to erecting perimeter fencing and creating a sheltered area.

Anti social behaviour on the Common: The Manager reported that there had been no further problems with poaching of swans, but there had been some problems with people using metal detectors, lamping, and use of quad bikes. The police are aware of the issues.

London In Bloom Award: Douglas Mobsby had attended the award ceremony in Merton to formally collect the award on behalf of Conservators. The Chair thanked Douglas and also suggested that it would be good to display all the awards the Common has received on the walls of the Ecology Centre.

5. Administration and Management Report

1. Acid Grassland Restoration Project

1.1 The funding application to SUEZ Communities Trust (formerly SITA Trust) was successful and the Trust has agreed to fund the cost of the scrub and tree removal on the Seven Islands Pond and Golf Course sub-sites of the Common.

1.2 The grant of £7,045 is subject to a number of conditions namely:

- The Board provide the Contributing Third Party payment of £810.17
- A joint press release
- A Project Delivery Plan is developed and agreed
- A Funding Agreement is signed by both parties

1.3 All of the conditions have now been satisfied and the Manager was able to report that the first phase of the project had been completed. The next phase of the project will start in January 2017.

1.4 The project application submitted to SUEZ Communities Trust included a commitment by the Board to fund an interpretation panel to explain the importance

of acid grassland. The design and production of the panel will cost between £500-£1000. The Manager recommended that this is funded by the Mitcham Common Education Trust.

RESOLVED: Funding for the Interpretation panel to be made via the Mitcham Common Education Trust.

2. The Future of the Mitcham Common Environmental Trust

2.1 The objective of the Mitcham Common Environmental Trust is for *“the environmental protection, the provision, improvement or maintenance of Mitcham Common as a public amenity”*.

2.2 The Trust was established in 1998 and registered with ENTRUST as an Environmental Body in accordance with the Landfill Tax Regulations 1996.

2.3 Environmental Bodies are organisations that have registered with ENTRUST in order to receive Landfill Communities Fund money from Landfill Operators or other Environmental Bodies.

2.4 In the past the Mitcham Common Environmental Trust has been successful with funding applications for environmental projects on the Common. However over the years the Landfill Tax Regulations have been amended and organisations wishing to apply for money from the Landfill Communities Fund no longer need to be registered as Environmental Bodies. Indeed as was demonstrated by the recent application to Viridor Credits, some Landfill Operators will not now consider applications made by another Environmental Body.

2.5 In light of the above and the recent successful application to the SUEZ Communities Fund by the Mitcham Common Conservators, the Mitcham Common Environmental Trust may no longer need to be enrolled in the Landfill Communities Trust scheme.

Conservators were asked to note that there will be opportunities to use the monies still available in the Environmental Trust funds for capital projects.

RESOLVED: The Manager was instructed to investigate the voluntary revocation of the Mitcham Common Environmental Trust from the Landfill Communities Fund and report back at the next meeting.

3. Enforcement Matters: For Information

3.1 Traffic Monitoring Equipment

- 3.1.1 In February 2016, a contractor working for the Department of Transport installed a cabinet on common land outside 295 Commonside East, without the consent of the Board.
- 3.1.2 Eventually the cabinet was relocated onto the adjoining public footpath and the common land reinstated to a satisfactory standard

3.2 'The Meadows', Commonside East

- 3.2.1 The 'over the fence' fly-tipping was observed during the Annual Inspection. Notting Hill Housing's Property Manager agreed that this tipping clearly emanated from one of their properties and has therefore arranged to have it cleared from the Common.

3.3 Former Windmill Road Industrial Estate, Junction of Commonside East and Windmill Road

- 3.3.1 Several trees growing on the Common, but overhanging the above-mentioned site, have been damaged by contractors constructing the residential development. The trees all have Preservation Orders and Merton's Tree Preservation Order Officer has been advised of the damage.
- 3.3.2 As noted at the Spring Inspection, several kerb stones on either side of the entrance to the development site had been damaged by large delivery vehicles entering the site.
- 3.3.3 Although this practice has largely ceased, to date the damage has not been repaired. Merton's Enforcement Team are aware of the situation and it is anticipated that they will require the developer to make all necessary repairs before the development is completed.
- 3.3.4 In October a large sign, advertising Viridian House, was placed on common land outside the development site. Viridian's Project Manager was advised that the sign did not have the consent of the Conservators and it was subsequently removed.

3.4 Mill Green, London Borough of Sutton

- 3.4.1 In August 2016, a contractor working for AFL, a fibre optics company commissioned by Vodafone to undertake installations in Sutton, dug a trench and installed ducting on the edge of Mill Green.
- 3.4.2 The works were stopped and the trench backfilled. However given the proximity of the trench to mature trees, root damage was considered likely to have occurred.
- 3.4.3 AFL was instructed to commission a specialist contractor to re-open the trench with an air spade so that an Arboricultural Officer from Sutton Council could inspect the trees for possible root damage.
- 3.4.4 The inspection took place towards the end of October. The interim verbal report to the Manager advised that one tree had root damage that would require remedial works to its crown.
- 3.4.5 The Manager reported that there has now been a report from Sutton's Tree officer and the next stage will involve carrying out some remedial works. A valuation on the damaged tree will be submitted and used to hold Vodafone to account for the damage their works caused.

3.5 Harvester Restaurant

- 3.5.1 The Manager reported that the Harvester Restaurant, will be closing from mid-January, to be refurbished to become a Miller and Carter Steak House, due to be re-opened in early March 2017.
 - 3.5.2 The owners of the restaurant are responsible for closing the Mill House Ecology Centre car parking on weekday evenings and opening and closing the car park at weekends. This task will be undertaken by the contract foreman over the refurbishment period.
 - 3.5.3 In response to a question the Manager said that the refurbishment project would not include any work to the ancient windmill base which is situated in the car park.
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6. Friends of Mitcham Common -To report on recent activities and to raise any relevant matters

Darren Stillwell came to the table and spoke to the meeting about the following matters:

- 6.1 He had been reviewing Merton's Business Plan 2016 - 2020 and noted that there were sizeable cuts to funding to the Conservators proposed by Merton, and also cuts to the Wandle Valley Trust. He sought Conservators' views on this.

The Chairman said that Conservators were aware of the funding threats and the issue of funding was on the agenda for discussion later in the meeting. The Chairman said that the Conservators shared the Friends' deep concerns, and commended the work the Friends do in raising awareness. The Chairman also explained that the Conservators were already in the process of undertaking some work to look at the statutory obligations of the funding authorities (Sutton, Merton and Croydon) and hoped to be in a position to report back on this in the Spring. In the meantime Conservators have arranged to meet with the relevant Cabinet member in Merton and to continue to make the arguments about the importance of appropriate funding. The Chairman said that as the relevant cabinet member for Croydon he was able to confirm that Croydon has no plans to cut its contribution, but recognised that this is a much smaller amount.

- 6.2 The Friends would also welcome the Conservators' views on the new contractor for Greenspaces in Merton, Idverde.

The Chairman explained that the Conservators were due to receive a briefing during part 2 of the current meeting. The Chairman gave his assurance that the Conservators are liaising with Merton with a view to ensuring that the terms and conditions of the new contract will not have any negative impact on the management of the Common, and promised to keep the Friends up to date with developments.

- 6.3 30 representatives of the Friends had met the Mayor of Merton for a reception held to celebrate the work of the Friends. Darren said that this had been a very positive event and Friends were pleased to have their work recognised and acknowledged in this way. Conservators also added their thanks and congratulations.

- 6.4 The Friends will be holding a Christmas party in the Ecology Centre on 17th December 2pm - 5pm.

- 6.5 He asked if the Christmas event on the Fairsite, which had been previously discussed, would be taking place. The Manager responded and said that this had not come to fruition.

6.6 He reported the sad news of the recent deaths of two long standing Friends: Sheila Greatwood, who was a past Secretary, and Eric Montague, who was a local historian of the Mitcham area and had written the definitive Mitcham Histories. Conservators extended their condolences and shared their recognition of the significant contribution which Sheila Greatwood and Eric Montague had made.

At the conclusion to the points raised by Darren Stillwell, the Chairman and Conservators voiced their thanks to the Friends and re-confirmed their support and awareness of the importance of the work which the Friends are doing.

7. Income and Expenditure (Until end of November 2016)

Conservators were in receipt of the Income and Expenditure report. The Manager reported that Croydon had paid its annual contribution on 1st December, so the variance figure was now -£6,207 (which was a result of the shortfall from Sutton).

There were no further comments.

8. Investments: Portfolio Valuation (enclosed for Members)– Report from Richard Auld

Richard Auld gave Conservators an overview of the influences and pressures on the markets at the current time, in the context of world events. He explained that the portfolio had not performed overall as highly as would have been ideal, but reminded Conservators that the wide spread of investments includes many with fixed interest returns. He reminded Conservators of the importance of having a diversified portfolio, and said that at the moment he would not propose any changes.

Cllr Mansell asked if there was any concern about the lower yield returns on some investments (eg Scottish Mortgage), he advised that this was not a concern, noting that Scottish Mortgage is included as part of the wide investment strategy, and is a safe capital growth prospect rather than a high income yield. During wider discussion there was general agreement and understanding about the approach which is taken with the investment portfolio noting that the remit for the Conservators is to take a low risk approach and not a speculative approach to stocks.

As a newer Conservator Cllr Mansell said she would also like to ask about whether or not there is an ethical policy with regard to investments? Richard Auld said that this issue had been previously raised and discussed and explained that it would not be practicable for everyone to contribute their personal preferences for areas of investment because this would limit the scope for offering a diversified portfolio. He said that he took a measured approach and always presented his recommendations, and there was no investment in mining stocks or oil.

With regard to the total figure for investment income for the current financial year, this was currently showing as £47,000 though it was anticipated that the actual figure will be nearer £57,000. Conservators said that they recognised that investment income was a significant element for funding of works and acknowledged the significance of this particularly in a context of threatened cuts to funding.

At the conclusion to the discussion the Chairman thanked Richard Auld on behalf of the Conservators for his work and advice which was very much appreciated.

RESOLVED: Conservators agreed unanimously to the recommendation from Richard Auld that there should be no changes made to the portfolio

9. Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust –Report from Mr Cheetham

John Cheetham reported that he had met with members of the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust on 9th November for a Trustees meeting, on 18th November for the launch of the new strategy, and on 29th November at London Guild Hall. The Trust is currently putting together a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and he said that he would report back on this and the potential significance for Conservators when more information is known. The Chairman thanked John Cheetham for his feedback.

10. Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 8 March 2017

11. Any Other Business

None.

The meeting was closed at 7.25pm
