

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MITCHAM COMMON CONSERVATORS
(A Statutory Corporation constituted by the Metropolitan Commons
(Mitcham) Supplemental Act 1891)
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 20TH MARCH 2024 AT 7:00PM

Present:

Mr. J. Cheetham
Cllr R. Clifton
Cllr J. Gould
Cllr M. Whelton, Chair
Ms. A. Fairweather
Cllr D. Johnston
Mr. N. Jones
Cllr. D. Tchil

In Attendance:

Mr. M. Boyle – Manager of Mitcham Common
Mr P. Moorhouse - Warden of Mitcham Common
Mr R. Auld - Investment Adviser
Ms. L. Parry - Minute taker
Ms. M. Nunzet - representing the Friends of Mitcham Common

Absent:

Ms. A. Dines
Cllr. S. Fox
Cllr M. Griffiths
Cllr. C Herman
Cllr. N. Irons

THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

1. Apologies for Absence

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Apologies for absence had been received from Ms A. Dines, Cllr M. Griffiths and Cllr N. Irons.

2. Declarations of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. **Minutes of the last Meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 10th January 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate account and were duly signed and dated by the Chair.

4. **Matters Arising**

P2. Flytipping: The Manager reported that CCTV has now been installed on Cedars Avenue and existing flytipping has been removed.

P2. SGN Project: The Manager said that as predicted the licence agreement took some time to sort out and was only finally signed off earlier this month. The project has now started, and as the ground conditions are difficult, the contractors are working by hand. Progress is good and it is expected that the work will be concluded within 2 months.

P3: Motorbikes on the Common: It was noted that there had been no improvement with this problem. Cllr Tchil said that he had tried to make contact with the neighbourhood police unit but had not received replies. It was agreed that further efforts at Borough Command level were now required.

RESOLVED: Chair/Manager to compose a letter to be sent to the Borough Commander explaining the dangers of motorbikes on the common and requesting the support of the police to protect the public and the common.

5. **Investments Portfolio (enclosed for Members)- Report from Mr Auld**

Conservators were in receipt of a letter from Mr Auld outlining advice on the portfolio at the current time. Mr Auld spoke to this advice at the meeting.

Conservators fully supported the recommendations noting the clear rationale provided and authorised the go ahead with the proposals.

RESOLVED: Holding in Johnson Matthey to be sold. Funds from sale of Johnson Matthey holdings to be used to purchase shares in General Accident.

Cllr Gould raised concerns about the shares held by the Conservators in Shell and BP and requested that Conservators divest themselves of these shares with immediate effect. During discussion it was agreed that a meeting of the Investments Sub Group will be convened as soon as possible to enable a wider and more in depth discussion about a forward looking approach to the portfolio. This will need to look at issues of the balance of interests (ie raising sufficient rate of return to enable the Conservators' work to protect and preserve Mitcham Common versus maintaining a portfolio which is broadly in keeping with the philosophy and outlook of conservation, with companies that do not compromise those values). It was also

agreed that it would be helpful to find out how other green trusts/organisations manage this issue with their investments.

The Chair thanked Mr Auld for his attendance and input.

RESOLVED: Meeting of the Sub Investments group to be convened at the earliest opportunity. Members of the group to research other green space trusts and their approach to managing investments. Recommendations to be brought back to the next meeting.

6. Administration and Management Report

Management Plan: 2023 Annual Report:

P4: The Manager drew attention to the action point to explore the opportunities of resurfacing the footpath (PROW 184) from the Gunsite entrance which has now been carried forward to the 2024 Work programme.

Voluntary support: The Manager highlighted that the support and impact of volunteer involvement has been very significant this year and this is down in no small part to the organisation of the people who lead the work and they deserve a lot of credit. It was also important to recognise that volunteers require support from staff in order to be strategic and effective. It also continues to be important that appropriate risk assessments and insurance etc are fully in place at all times so that volunteers can work safely and with best practice.

Conservators spoke individually of their appreciation and thanks to the Friends and other volunteers who have worked so hard during the course of the year in support of maintaining the Common, with litter picks and clearance etc, for people to enjoy.

Management Plan: 2024 Work Programme

The Manager drew attention to the fact that there was an ambitious Work Programme set out for 2024.

Under the action of seeking public sponsorship for **replacement benches** it was noted that this will be on the Conservators' website shortly, and it was also suggested by Conservators that Croydon, Sutton and Merton are also asked to promote this through their social media.

The Manager drew Conservators' particular attention to the action to look at renewal options for the **Countryside Stewardship Agreement** which will end in December 2024. It was noted that the payments for this have risen this year from £6,000 to £18,000 (reflected in the budget plan) but an application for a new agreement will be a major piece of work and will require a lot of evidence to meet the threshold for a successful bid.

The Manager recommended that the target to provide an **exercise route** on the Common is deferred until more information is received from the Head of Green spaces about a orienteering project proposal on Mitcham Common and other greenspaces in Merton. This was agreed by the Conservators.

RESOLVED: Further clarification on proposals with regard to orienteering/exercise routes to be sought from the Head of Greenspaces Merton.

SGN: Gas Main replacement

The Manager showed Conservators the site of proposed works on the map, noting that the works will mainly be completed without the need to dig an open trench.

The contractors will require some designated sites on the Common for compound areas.

There is a formula for funding compound areas which will be followed.

The Manager also asked Conservators to note that as a consequence of the works which are likely to take 2 - 3 months over the summer, the whole of the Fairsite area will be out of action meaning that licences for events/activities can not be granted this year in the summer months and there will not be any opportunity to gain income from events on the Fairsite over the summer period. The Manager had recently received an application to hold a small music festival on the site in the summer, which cannot now be considered because of the SGN works.

Conservators agreed unanimously that they would hope/expect to receive reasonable compensation from SGN for loss of anticipated income from events this summer, and authorised the Manager to negotiate on their behalf to secure the best possible compensation arrangements.

RESOLVED: Manager to negotiate with SGN to secure best possible compensation arrangements and compound hire arrangements, as well as ensuring that a full restoration programme from SGN will be put in place once the works are completed. Update at the next meeting.

Google Maps: Norman Jones spoke to the report he had produced about the work undertaken to promote the Common on Google Maps by the addition of sub-site locations. Norman had now added five new locations to the existing four locations. Conservators agreed that this was a very helpful and useful way of promoting and sharing information about the Common, and thanked Norman for his work.

Review of Golf Club licence: Conservators authorised the commissioning of a consultant to undertake the 7 yearly review of the Golf Club licence, to find out if the base rate is set at the right level in the current market. This report is due by April 2025. The Manager said that he would begin trying to source a suitably qualified consultant.

RESOLVED: Manager to work on commissioning a consultant to undertake the review of the Golf Club licence. Update on progress to be reported at the next meeting.

7. Income and Expenditure (Until end of February 2024)

It was recognised that the Income and Expenditure report was clear and self explanatory with no areas of concern. The Manager drew Conservators' particular attention to the fact that last year was particularly successful from ad hoc facility licence agreements which had been unanticipated at the point the budget had been set, meaning that planned income of £35,000 was exceeded by £25,000. Conservators were grateful to the Manager for his success in negotiating additional facility licences during the last year.

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

Melanie Nunzet was welcomed to the table who gave a report from the Friends as follows:

- 1) The Friends have received permission from the Manager to hold their AGM/Open Day at the Ecology Centre on Saturday 6 July between the hours of 11.15am and 4 pm. They would like to express their thanks that there will be no charge for the use of the Centre, as was the case last year. Friends are hoping to hold a photo competition and offer walks and talks. The Mayor of Merton has been invited.
It was suggested the Mayors of Sutton and Croydon could also be invited.

- 2) We would like to ask if the Conservators will allow the Friends to erect gazebos and tables on the green next to the Ecology Centre, and north of the car park.
This was agreed

- 3) Further to Rose's report at the last meeting regarding litter picking we can confirm that the new litter picking app is working well and we are now able to submit data on volunteer hours to the Manager.

So far this year we have held seven litter picks, two at Seven Islands, two at Bidders and three around the Mill House area.

On behalf of Conservators, the Chair thanked the Friends for all the work they do, noting the tremendous impact of the litter picks in helping to keep the Common in good order

- 4) London in Bloom – Can the Manager please give us some feedback on why Mitcham Common cannot be entered for this annual competition? Several other green spaces in Mitcham regularly win this award and we would like Mitcham

Common to be entered in 2025. Is there anything the Friends can do to help the Manager with the application?

The Manager explained that there was no objection in principle to an entry for the London in Bloom competition. However, this was not something that was felt to be a good use of Conservators' resources, as the completion of the application form requires a lot of time from the Manager/Warden, plus a financial outlay. Conservators said that they would be in support of the Friends completing an application for London in Bloom if they wished to do so.

9. Annual Programme of Meetings 2024/25 – Proposed dates

Spring Inspection: Sunday 19th May 2024

June Board Meeting: Wednesday 12th June 2024

Annual Inspection: Sunday 15th September 2024

September Board Meeting: Wednesday 25th September 2024

Janaury Board Meeting: Wednesday 8th January 2025

March Board Meeting: Wednesday 19th March 2025

The proposed dates were provisionally agreed. However, the Chair said that once all the Council meeting schedules are known, there may possibly be a need to change some dates.

10. Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust – Report from Cllr. Gould

Cllr Gould reported that she had been unable to attend the most recent meeting and had not received any minutes of the meeting, so could not provide any feedback.

11. Date of Next Meeting Wednesday 12th June 2024

12. Any Other Business

None

At the conclusion to business the Chair closed the public part of the meeting and thanked all members of the public for their attendance. Once again on behalf of Conservators, the Chair thanked the Friends for their support and work which was very much valued and appreciated.