



MOUSEHOLD HEATH CONSERVATORS

2pm to 3.45pm

19 October 2012

Present: Councillors Bradford (chair following appointment), Little (vice chair following appointment) (part of item 11 below only), Ackroyd, Lay and Price; and Margaret Bush (The Mousehold Heath Defenders) and Chris Southgate (The Norwich Society)

Apologies: Councillors Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Henderson, and Price; and Matthew Davies (The Norwich Fringe Project) and Debbie Murray (The Conservation Volunteers)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2012.

2. BUDGET MONITORING STATEMENT APRIL 2012 - SEPTEMBER 2012

The finance control manager (LGSS) presented the report.

In reply to Chris Southgate's question on whether the higher pension contributions were peculiar to the Mousehold Heath cost centre or part of a similar trend across the council, the finance control manager said that the reasons for the high pensions contribution costs were being investigated and that he would report back to the next meeting with advice on corrective action. He also agreed that the capital spend on the "pavilion" referred to the Fountain Ground changing rooms and not the premises currently let to Zak's, which was also known as the pavilion, and that this would be amended in future reports.

The head of local neighbourhood services referred to the overspend on ground maintenance and said that in future spending on this contract would be spread out across the year as there was greater spend in summer than in the autumn and winter. The community and neighbourhood manager (north) confirmed that he would be monitoring it.

The finance control manager said that he would continue to work with the head of local neighbourhood services and the community and neighbourhood manager (north) to improve the quality of the budget reports to the Conservators.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the current budget monitoring position;
- (2) ask the finance control manager to:
 - (1) provide further information on the pension deficit recovery figure and advise on corrective action.
 - (2) ensure that references to the pavilion in the capital budget are amended to "the Fountain Ground changing rooms".
- (3) note that budgets for ground maintenance will be spread across the year in future.

3. MANAGEMENT SUB GROUP

The community and neighbourhood manager (north) presented the report and referred to the minutes of the management sub-group meeting held on 24 September 2012.

During discussion the Conservators noted the success of the HEART heritage trail leaflets and that almost the entire original print run of 250 leaflets had been distributed. The Conservators considered that a further 1,000 leaflets should be printed and that this would be a reasonable number given that there might be changes arising from the review of the five year management plan for the heath. The community and neighbourhood manager (north) said that the leaflet would also be available on the website for members of the public to print copies themselves. The council's winter edition of Citizen would be featuring a half page article on walks on the heath.

Discussion ensued on the positive publicity received as a result of the Connect 2 cycle scheme and about how the Conservators should respond to negative comments about the scheme. Councillor Little expressed concern that cyclists going too fast could be a problem for other users particularly at junctions and suggested that signage was used to advise them to be considerate of other users. The chair pointed out that this needed to be balanced with concerns to keep signage to a minimum to avoid intrusion onto the rural amenity of the heath. Chris Southgate said that Councillor Brociek-Coulton was concerned about the works on Gurney Road and that the 20mph signs warning signs were inadequate. Councillor Brociek-Coulton had also expressed concern about verge parking on Britannia Road to Mons Avenue which might be encroaching onto the heath. The head of local neighbourhood services advised the Conservators to refer any concerns about the implementation of the Connect 2 cycle scheme to Tony Jones, the city growth and development programme coordinator, for a response. Councillors could use the councillors' enquiry scheme to report concerns. The scheme might take a month or two to become established. Parking on the verges in Britannia Road was a perennial problem and officers would look into it.

The Conservators then referred to the remainder of the minutes of the subgroup meeting and noted that the statement under item 7, high level stewardship, should be amended to accurately reflect that "less than 9% of Mousehold Heath" was heathland and "not less than 8%" as stated. It was also noted that the key to the

Fountain Ground changing rooms had been found. Figures on the usage of the changing rooms would be available at the next meeting.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) approve the printing of 1,000 HEART heritage trail leaflets;
- (3) contact Tony Jones, the city growth and development programme coordinator, on 01603 212234 or email tonyjones@norwich.gov.uk with concerns arising from the implementation of the Connect 2 cycle scheme;
- (4) ask the community and neighbourhood manager (north) to report back to the next meeting on:
 - (a) parking on the grass verges in Britannia Road;
 - (b) the statistics for the number of people using the Fountains Ground changing rooms.

4. MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The community and neighbourhood manager (north) presented the report and highlighted the exceptional support received from volunteers who had provided over 1,000 hours of management work on the heath.

During discussion members referred to the opportunities that the heath presented to schoolchildren to learn about its history, biodiversity and ecology and how this should be promoted to schools across the city. The Conservators considered that it would be useful to hand out the Mousehold Heath general leaflet would be useful to hand out at schools and that references should also be made to the website. The head of local neighbourhood services suggested that the revision of the leaflet should be progressed through the management subgroup and that a review of educational material should be picked up as part to the review of the management plan. It was noted that the Mousehold Heath Defenders had a website. The Conservators also considered that information on the council's website should be adapted to make it easier to use from a mobile device.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) record the committee's gratitude to the volunteers who had contributed their time to the management of the heath;
- (3) consider the detail of the revision of the Mousehold Heath general leaflet at the management subgroup.

5. MOUSEHOLD HEATH MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

The head of local neighbourhood services presented the report, and together with the natural areas officer, answered questions from the Conservators.

Discussion ensued in which the chair endorsed the process of reviewing the five year plan and setting priorities for the next five year period. The chair and natural areas officer acknowledged the contribution that the Mousehold Defenders had made by working in partnership with the council and the Conservators.

Margaret Bush, on behalf of the Defenders, thanked the chair and said that improved communications about the objectives and greater understanding of the history of the heath had contributed to a more successful partnership.

In reply to a question the natural areas officer explained that the management of scrubland on the heath was based on sound management principles. Intensive scraping of the heath to remove the scrub was successful but had been avoided in the past because it appeared to be dramatic. It was noted that the woodland area at St James Hill was being considered. In response to a members' question, the natural areas officer explained that although there was a public perception that Heathgate and Valley Drive were part of the heath both areas were actually outside its legal boundaries. In reply to a question that the city side of the Vinegar Pond had become very overgrown, the natural areas officer said that each area of the heath should be managed on a cyclical basis, with some areas requiring a higher level of stewardship than others.

Chris Southgate presented a number of proposals for consideration as part of the review of the plan, which included:

- establishing a reasonable target for the percentage of the heath to be recovered as heathland;
- establishing whether the current level of volunteers could be sustained and identifying mechanisms to increase it;
- objective consideration of the use of herbicides to clear shrub on the heath;
- the potential to publicise the heath through the website (computers and portable devices) and leaflets and bring together the various data on ecology, geo-physical, biodiversity, history etc.
- external funding.

He contested the statement that the appointment of an additional warden had been due to "a windfall" and pointed out that it had been the result of pressure from the Conservators and the Defenders. The plan referred to car park surfacing as "waiting options and a decision by Conservators" and said that this should be brought before the Conservators for a decision.

The head of local neighbourhood services referred to the management plan and proposed that the management group met to discuss the review of the plan and how the Conservators should prioritise resources against its budget for the next five year period. He also referred to the issues surrounding the revenue costs of using a car park surfaces which were sympathetic to the "rural" amenity of the heath and that revenue costs for the higher maintenance should be taken into consideration.

During discussion the Conservators noted that a decision should be made on the lease of the Pavilion. It was proposed that the details of this should be considered by the management subgroup and delegated to the head of local neighbourhood services, in consultation with the chair and vice chair.

Discussion ensued on the management of the woodland glades and the preservation of various trees, such as the "Mother Oak" and the redwoods, the natural areas officer, explained that tree preservation orders were usually placed on trees when at risk but that he would investigate and report back to the Conservators. He confirmed that these trees were under no threat and would be preserved.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report and the timescale for the approval of the revised plan in January 2013;
- (2) refer the management plan to the management subgroup for further consideration and discussion with officers;
- (3) delegate the decision on the lease of the Pavilion to the head of local neighbourhood services, subject to consultation with the chair and the vice chair.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED to:

- (1) confirm that the next meeting of the Conservators will be held at City Hall on Friday 18 January 2013 and agree to hold a management sub-group meeting in the interim:
- (2) note that the items for consideration at the next meeting will include:
 - (a) setting the precept for 2013-14;
 - (b) a costed work programme for 2013-14;
 - (c) the revised management plan.

CHAIR