



**Mousehold Heath Conservators**

**14:00 to 16:10**

**15 January 2021**

Present: Councillors Maxwell (chair), Price (vice chair), Brociek-Coulton, Button, Kendrick, Neale (substitute for Councillor Osborn), Sands (M), Sands (S), Clare Cohen (Mousehold Heath Defenders), Matthew Davies (Norwich Fringe Project) and John Trevelyan (Norwich Society)

Apologies: Councillors Lubbock and Osborn

**1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. Public questions/petitions**

There were no public questions.

**3. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2020.

(The chair agreed to revise the order of the agenda so that the presentation on the environmental services update was taken earlier in the meeting to release the officers and the finance reports were taken in a logical order.)

**4. Environmental Services Update**

(Hannah Leys, managing director, Norwich City Services Ltd, and Helen Lambert, project manager (NNE), attended the meeting for this item.)

The managing director (NCSL) and project manager (NEE) gave a power point presentation on the city council's transfer of services to Norwich City Services Ltd (NCSL). (A copy of the presentation is available on the council's website with the agenda and papers for this meeting.) The transfer of environmental services to NCSL was on track for 1 April 2021. They said that they would welcome an invitation back to a meeting of the Conservators next year to report on progress.

In reply to questions from the vice chair, the managing director explained that NCSL would engage with the Conservators by working closely with the parks and open spaces manager and there would be quarterly stakeholder liaison meetings, which he would attend. A review of service specifications would commence from day one to accurately capture what was being delivered. The timing of the stakeholder liaison meetings could be scheduled to allow for the parks and open spaces manager to feed any issues raised at meetings of the Conservators into it. The parks and open spaces manager commented that he considered that there would be a seamless transition to NCSL. He also pointed out that the wardens maintained an issue log of any issues arising from contracts so he did not anticipate any problems in reporting these to NCSL.

In reply to a further question on the company's environmental credentials, the managing director said that the council and NCSL were committed to the council's environmental strategy and carbon reduction targets. The Conservators were advised that the depot would have a solar panels on its roof, that there would be two electric vehicles from the start of the contract with proposals to expand the fleet as opportunities arose, and that teams were trialling the use of electric power tools to roll these out across the service if found effective. The company would also have its own targets for environment improvements. NCSL would be happy to undertake a site visit to the heath with members and officers at the earliest opportunity.

Councillor Brociek-Coulton welcomed Hannah Leys to her new role, as she had worked with her previously on Norwich in Bloom and had been impressed by the level of service that had been received.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) thank Hannah Leys, managing director NCLS, and Helen Lambert, project manager (NEE) for attending the meeting and for their presentation;
- (2) extend an invitation to NCLS to attend the January 2022 meeting of the Conservators
- (3) hold a site visit accompanied by NCSL and officers to identify environmental improvements.

The finance business partner presented the report. He explained that the variance was incorrect, because of an issue with the repairs budget which should not have been added to the Conservators' account. The outturn figure of £222,492 was correct as was the level of reserves. He also explained that there was some confusion in the reports with the numbering of the pension instalments and confirmed that the 7<sup>th</sup> instalment had been paid in 2019-20, the 8<sup>th</sup> instalment in 2020-21, the 9<sup>th</sup> instalment was due in 2021-22 and the final instalment was due in 2022-23. The balance carried forward from 2019-20 was £18,270. The Conservators still held the capital receipt for the sale of the Rangers' House and would need council approval for any capital expenditure.

The vice chair commented on the report and said the management of the budgets and service delivery, and creation of an underspend, was a credit to the officers.

The capital programme was part of the Conservators' 10 year work programme and works on the football ground and pavilion would be brought forward next year. There was a prudent level of reserves and the pension liability debt would be paid in instalments.

The vice chair then referred to the minutes of the previous meeting (17 January 2020) where he had expressed concern that the prudent management of the Conservators' reserves could be undermined by a recharge from Norwich City Council and that the Conservators had requested a risk assessment to be undertaken so that they could have all the information available to them when making decisions on the precept and prudent level of reserves. The finance business partner said that the prudent level of reserves was 5 per cent of the overall budget. There was no scope to reduce expenditure but that after the pensions liability debt had been paid off a further £3,000 would be added to the reserves each year. Officers confirmed that some work had been done on this. The vice chair commented that the Conservators should be aware of the true, quantifiable risk when setting its precept and considering the prudent management. The parks and open spaces manager acknowledged this concern and, in the interests of due diligence, suggested that in future years the Conservators considered the risk assessment at its September meeting which would then inform the setting of the precept in January.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) note the revenue and capital outturn positions for 2019-20;
- (2) that officers undertake a risk assessment of recharges from the city council and that the information is considered at the Conservators' September meeting before the setting of the precept and prudent level of reserves at the January meeting.

**6.**

The finance business partner presented the report. As explained in relation to the previous report, the budget appeared to be higher than the precept because of the inclusion of the repairs budget making the underspend greater than the actual amount. He also confirmed that the pension instalment for this financial year was the 8<sup>th</sup> not 9<sup>th</sup> as referred to in the report.

The parks and opens spaces manager confirmed that the underspend, achieved through the management of the budgets, was just under £6,000.

**RESOLVED** to note the current budget monitoring position and capital position.

The financial business partner presented the report. He explained that the opening reserves for 2021-2022 was £15,525 rather than £17,060 (*Budget & Precept 2021-22*, paragraph 3). The underspend of £1,598 should be corrected to £63. The chair commented that last year an additional £6,000 had been requested the previous year for the pavilion works and was reassured that the precept this year could be reduced by £4,636.

During discussion, the Conservators considered whether the level of balances should be increased or decreased, in light of the council's risk environment and steps to mitigate the risks. Councillor Kendrick, in his capacity as cabinet member for resources, said that risk levels had to be calculated and advised members to be guided by the officers' recommendations, as set out in the report.

John Trevelyan pointed out that the actual figures at year end might be better than projected and commented that the letting of the pop-up café concession would generate an income that was not accounted for in the proposed budgets for 2021-22.

The vice chair commented that it had been proposed to increase the level of reserves to 10 per cent of the annual budget over time, not the 5 per cent recommended by the officers, and called on Councillor Kendrick to engage the support of cabinet colleagues to progress the risk assessment (of potential recharges from the city council) so that the Conservators were in an informed position when it set a prudent level or reserves next year.

**RESOLVED** having considered the report to:

- (1) approve the budget proposals set out in paragraph 10 of the report and approve the budgets set out in Appendix A
- (2) place a precept on Norwich City Council for to fund expenditure would be **£235,471** (20/21 £240,107) (this will be a decrease of £4,636 from the 2020/21 precept).

The parks and open spaces manager presented the report. He referred to the 10 year work programme and because of the pandemic it had been necessary to move three work streams. The review of the tree safety strategy was in progress but would not be completed by April and would be included in the work programme for 2021-2022. The review of sports provision had not been started this year and therefore would also slip to the 2021-2022 work programme. As a consequence the review of the wardens' office accommodation would slip to 2022-2023. Decisions on these reviews would be delivered in the following year.

Members were also advised that the Green Flag award was awarded on an annual basis and that it would be necessary to apply for accreditation each year.

The parks and opens spaces manager referred to the report and outlined the costings for the works to the pavilion that were proposed to take place in 2021-2022.

In reply to a question about the provision of car and cycle parking for visitors to the heath and whether it could accommodate large numbers of visitors, the parks and opens spaces manager said that the wardens had reported an increase in visitors to the heath, which in the summer had been up by 70 per cent. Mousehold Heath had a large number of access points which dissipated visitors, unlike Eaton Park for instance, and had its own car park. The pandemic had provided a greater understanding of how people used outdoor space and what was important to people for their recreation. The vice chair suggested that there should be a press release

on the heath and that he would speak to the communications team about this. He also suggested that the Beryl Bikes should be available on the heath.

During discussion, the Conservators agreed the proposed changes to the work programme. The use of the reserves to deliver the pavilion works was considered prudent. The vice chair suggested that the Conservators considered establishing a subcommittee to oversee the project and monitor expenditure.

**RESOLVED** to approve:

- (1) the annual work programme for 2021-2022;
- (2) £3,150 expenditure from reserves to deliver the pavilion works required in 2021-22.

The parks and open spaces manager presented the report for the period 1 April 2020 to 15 January 2021. He paid particular tribute to the two wardens who had continued to deliver against the Mousehold Heath management plan objectives in despite the impact of Covid-19, which had included increased visitor numbers to the heath and the introduction of home working for council officers.

The Conservators noted that during this period, the parks and open spaces manager, in consultation with the chair and vice chair, had taken urgent decisions in relation to the concession on Britannia Road to the Sunset Café and the tree works to Turner's Oak which had an impact on the carpark.

The chair referred to the award of the Green Flag and thanked the Mousehold Heath Defenders and the officers for their contribution towards the receipt of this award.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

The chair introduced the report and thanked the officers for the production of the report.

John Trevelyan commented that he had visited the heath recently and said that there was plenty of space to exercise away from other people. He had also seen the evidence of the work that the wardens had been doing to maintain the heath.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

CHAIR