



Mousehold Heath Conservators

14:00 to 14:50

20 January 2023

Present: Sands (M) (chair), Brociek-Coulton (vice chair), Champion, Galvin, Kendrick, Kidman, Lubbock, Peek and Schmierer and Marion Maxwell (Mousehold Heath Defenders) and John Trevelyan (Norwich Society)

Apologies: Matthew Davies (Norwich Fringe Project)

In attendance Susan Moore, Parks and Open Spaces Manager
William Stewart, Mousehold Heath Warden

1. Public Questions/Petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

2. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2022.

4. Mousehold Heath Budget Monitoring to 30 November 2022

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager presented the report.

During discussion, the Mousehold Heath Warden explained that tree safety works, requiring a tree surgeon, were carried out by Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL) and that costs had increased. The wardens carried out all other tree works.

The chair referred to paragraph 4 of the report and welcomed the underspend of £4,5623, due to reduced contract costs and increased income from Pitch & Putt car park concession fees.

In reply to a member's question, the Parks and Open Spaces Manager said that the review of the contract for cleaning and grounds maintenance was to look at ways that savings could be made to reduce costs.

RESOLVED to note the current budget monitoring and reserves positions.

5. Mousehold Heath Conservators Budget and Precept 2023/24

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager presented the report. She pointed out that the proposal was to increase the base budget to take account of increased costs for employees, contractual cleaning and maintenance work, utility prices, fire insurance and corporate recharges.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to place a precept of £264,571 on Norwich City Council for the financial year 2023/24.

6. Annual Work Programme 2023/2024

(A supplementary report was circulated at the meeting, containing an amendment to Appendix 1, page 28 of the agenda papers) Detailed Project Description, Paragraph 3, to amend the reference to the Head of Neighbourhood Services and replace with Head of Environmental Services.)

The Mousehold Heath Warden presented the report. The annual work programme was summarised in Appendix 2 of the report.

During discussion the Conservators considered the prioritisation of projects on the work programme and how these could be reviewed and amended if necessary. Members noted that officers had allocated the priorities when setting the management plan and that there was an element of judgement in the process. The Conservators considered that the prioritisation for the following projects should be updated from “should” to “must”:

- World War II memorial plaque,
- delivery of the Norwich City Council Environmental Strategy,
- Cavalry Track,
- Vinegar Pond.

The chair pointed out that the delivery of the council's Biodiversity Strategy should also be included as a “must”.

The chair reminded members that the work programme was subject to budgetary and resource constraints and therefore this should be taken into account when prioritising projects. Officers had been careful not to designate too many projects as “must” to ensure delivery against the management plan. The Mousehold Heath Warden suggested that the Management Sub-Group considered the work programme at its next meeting. Proposed changes to the prioritisation would be considered at the next meeting of the Conservators.

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager suggested that the work programme was monitored at each meeting of the Conservators.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- (1) agree the Work Programme for 2023/24, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report, subject to noting the proposed changes to the priorities.

- (2) ask Management Sub-Group to review the priorities in the Work Programme and make recommendations to the next meeting of this committee;
- (3) ask that the Annual Work Programme is a standing item at each meeting so that the Conservators have an opportunity to monitor progress and review priorities throughout the year.

7. Mousehold Heath Management Update 6 September to 22 December 2022

The Mousehold Heath Warden presented the report. He explained that autumn/winter was a busy time for grass and scrub management on the heath because it was outside bird nesting season.

During the presentation, the Mousehold Heath Warden commented that 15 bags of litter had been removed from St James Hill from under gorse bushes and that this reduced the risk of fire. He explained that management of the gorse was necessary as it invaded areas of heather and was itself a fire hazard. It was managed in a similar way to coppiced woodland. Burnt areas of gorse were being cleared. Gorse bushes at around 10 years old were too “leggy” for bird nesting and created a greater fire hazard. In the past residents used gorse as a fuel for bread ovens. Members also noted that 15 volunteers were trained in the safe use of scythes, which would mean that mower use was reduced, and more areas could be cleared by scythe. He also referred to the report on the events, including educational visits from a school in Sprowston, information panels and historic walks.

The Mousehold Heath Warden drew members’ attention to paragraph 38 of the report and said that 1,239 community volunteer hours have been undertaken on the site between 6 September to 22 December 2022. The Conservators expressed their gratitude to the volunteers and wardens.

During questions from the Conservators, the Mousehold Heath Warden confirmed that they continued to work with Easton College. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager answered a question on the safe storage of the cast iron bins that were waiting for installation to replace the plastic ones. A member welcomed the replacement of bins with metal, noting that these would be more resilient to vandalism.

Discussion ensued on the removal of the wooden bollards, which a member suggested was by people whose antisocial use of the car parks was thwarted by the bollards. The Mousehold Heath Warden replied that the removal of the bollards, which were anchored with concrete, had not been witnessed. Antisocial behaviour was an ongoing problem and was being addressed.

RESOLVED to note the report.

8. Toilet Provision at Mousehold Heath

(This item was on the supplementary agenda for the meeting. A supplementary report was circulated with advised members that references to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in paragraph 5 and Appendix 1 had been superseded by the Equality Act 2010. The Disability Equality Duty in the DDA continues to apply.)

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager presented the report and referred the committee to Appendix 1 which set out the details and costings of the options 1 and 2. The women's toilets would be closed if option 1 was implemented.

During discussion, in which the Conservators considered the preferred option, a member commented that the refurbished toilets would provide a good service to visitors. A member questioned whether it would be possible to include solar panels as part of the refurbishment. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager said that the plans did not include solar panels which might not be suitable due to the location. It was something that she could raise with property services. The chair said that implementation of solar panels and battery storage could be costly but could save energy costs in the longer term.

In reply to a member's question, the Parks and Open Spaces Manager said that once the plans had been finalised works on the refurbishment could take weeks. She would be speaking to property services to ensure that Portaloos would be provided as an interim toilet facility for visitors to the heath.

Discussion ensued on Option 2. A member expressed concern that if this option was rejected, the facilities at the changing rooms would fall into disrepair. Officers confirmed that these facilities were used for school visits and hired out with the football pitch. The chair commented that he considered that £36,000 to upgrade the toilets at Zak's was money well spent and that facilities at the Fountain Ground changing rooms could be refurbished as budgets allowed in the future.

In reply to a member's question, the Mousehold Heath Warden explained that there would be an additional cost of £3,000 to repair the women's toilets to create a tool store. Instead, the facilities would be completely closed off and sealed to prevent vandalism. It was now proposed to store tools securely in a meeting room that was separate from the changing rooms on Fountain Ground. No additional works were required for this. Replying to a concern that the improved facilities could increase cleaning costs, the Parks and Open Spaces Manager said that the contract for cleaning was under review and that she did not expect it to increase. The chair pointed out that the new facilities could be easier to clean and maintain than the current facilities.

A member asked about the changing facilities for older children and adults. The Parks and Open Spaces Manager explained that there would be a standard hoist to transfer people who used wheelchairs, but that it was not possible to install a full adult size changing fold down bed, which would be costly and outside of the available budget provision. It was noted that there were adult changing facilities available at Norwich Castle and The Forum.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- (1) approve Option 1 (as set out in the report) as the preferred option for the refurbishment of the public toilet facilities on Mousehold Heath;
- (2) ask the Parks and Open Spaces Manager to enquire from property services whether solar panels can be incorporated into the plans.

CHAIR