



Mousehold Heath Conservators

14:15 to 15:30

20 January 2017

Present: Councillors Maxwell (chair), Price (vice chair), Bradford, Brociek-Coulton, Raby, Sands (M), Thomas (Vi) and Woollard; Clare Cohen (Mousehold Heath Defenders) and John Trevelyan (The Norwich Society)

Apologies: Councillor Lubbock and Matthew Davies (Norwich Fringe Project)

1. Public questions/petitions

Ms Michele Raychaudhuri, Gertrude Road, asked the following question:

“I recently attended a geology walk on the Heath lead by Tim Holt-Wilson. After further conversation he said that in 2012-13 he had submitted the outlines of a proposal to the HLF (Heritage Lottery Fund) for a community project to explore and celebrate the historic brick industry of Norwich, and in particular the Heath. At that time, he had consulted and gained indications of support from various local organisations, including yourselves.

His proposal had several strands, including an archaeological dig to unearth one of the kilns on the Heath; a history project exploring the written and oral evidence for the Norwich brick industry; a community art and technical project to build a working kiln and fire examples of locally-sourced brick earth; a geological project to identify outcrops of potential brick earth in the city and create a digital terrain map of the Heath.

I am keen to build on the work Tim has already done, and now develop the proposal into a fully funded HLF project. To have a chance of success with the HLF the project would need to have a community group in the driving seat. Back in 2013 the Defenders were interested in the idea, but someone was needed to work closely with Tim through the Feasibility Study and Project Plan phases, which would have meant three months’ intensive work. This was not able to happen then so the project was shelved. I think it is now time to dust it down and take it forward – with your support and that of the Defenders. Tim and I would like to work on the project, which may mean some kick-starter fundraising for the Feasibility Study, perhaps through crowd funding, charitable or other sources.

I would like to know if the Conservators are still willing to support such a venture?”

Simon Meek, the parks and open spaces manager, replied on behalf of the committee as follows:

“Thank you for submitting the details of what is an interesting proposal.

Approval to support the bid in principal and the allocation of resources will require approval at a Mousehold Conservators meeting. It would be worthwhile if a detailed proposal could be brought to a management sub-group meeting, to fully understand what is proposed, the desired outcomes for the project and the resources required (staff and financial). This will enable a report to be tabled for consideration and a decision, at a future Mousehold Conservators meeting.”

The parks and open spaces manager said that he would arrange to meet with Ms Raychaudhuri prior to the subgroup meeting to provide some guidance on what should be in the proposal.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2016, subject to amending the list of members present by deleting Matthew Davies (Norwich Fringe) and recording his apologies; and deleting John Trevelyan (The Norwich Society) (listed as present); Nigel Hales and Will Stewart (Mousehold Heath Wardens) who were not in attendance, from the list of also present; and Councillor Price from the list of apologies.

4. Budget and Precept 2017-18

(Neil Wright, service accountant, attended the meeting for this item.)

The chair introduced the report and, together with the vice chair, assured the Conservators that the subgroup had thoroughly discussed the proposed budget and precept in detail. There had been an increase in the precept in general staffing costs and corporate recharges. The ‘operational’ elements of the budget relating to the management work on the heath have been maintained at 2016-17 levels. The subgroup had identified that there might be potential to make savings and suggested that as part of the review of the grounds maintenance contract and the Mousehold Heath Management Plan 2018-2023, there should be a specific review of litter picking; and, as there were fewer bookings for the football pitch, consideration should be given to the justification of maintaining the pitch to Football Association standard or reducing the standard of maintenance to provide a facility for informal use. The subgroup also considered that there could be more efficient use of the premises on the Fountain Ground and that there was potential for income generation if it was let out for community use.

The parks and open spaces manager said that the reduction in football pitch bookings was part of a general trend across the city council’s parks because schools now hired out football pitches at a lower cost. He referred to the risk management section in the report and explained that the Conservators’ reserves were expected to

amount to £3,499, which represented 1.5 percent of the proposed budgeted expenditure. The level of reserves had previously been identified as 5 percent and it was proposed over the next three years to build up the level of reserves to £11,000.

During discussion the parks and open spaces manager referred to Appendix A and explained the movements under the budget headings, which had been done to enable more effective and efficient budget management. In reply to a question, he explained that, under the supplies and services heading, the £6,000 for projects was to fund project costs from one code rather than splitting it into other budget codes as in previous years. A member commented that the pension deficit would eventually be removed from the budget in future years.

Discussion ensued in which the vice chair commented on the exceptional value that the wardens brought to the service. Conservators commented on the wardens being pleased that they had been provided with a chain saw and that this enabled them to deliver a service, quickly and efficiently, without impacting on their other work. It was noted that there was provision in the budget for equipment and tools. In reply to a question about the benefit of providing additional equipment to enable more work to be done directly by the wardens, the parks and open manager explained that those aspects of site management that the wardens could take on with the most gain without a large impact on their day to day duties had been taken. The parks and open spaces manager also said that the wardens ensured that the most value was achieved out of the budget as possible; the delivery of the grounds maintenance contract on site was monitored to ensure the contracted services were being delivered; and, the wardens were always looking to identify improved ways of working and had the Conservator's interests at the forefront of everything that they did.

RESOLVED, having considered the report of the chief finance officer and noting the comments from the subgroup, to approve the Mousehold Heath Conservators' budget for 2017-18 (as set out in Appendix A of the report) and place a precept on Norwich City Council for the sum of £221,293.

5. Annual Work Programme 2017-18

The parks and open spaces manager presented the report and pointed out a correction to paragraph 1 in that "2015-16" should be deleted and replaced with "2016-17" as the reference should be to the 2016-17 works programme. He explained that while the operational budget had remained the same, more work had been delivered because of the wardens working with volunteers.

The chair congratulated the wardens and volunteers for their work to clear the heath to enable it to revert back to heathland. It had been pleasing to see the butterflies and moths on the heath. The parks and open areas manager said that the Conservators also should be recognised for having the vision and courage to decide to remove trees to get back this valuable habitat.

The vice chair commented on the work programme and said that the heath clearance and maintenance of the heathland was creating a legacy and preserving the bio-diversity intrinsic to this natural habitat. He also said that it was important to safeguard the mature trees in the wooded areas and have a maintenance plan to maintain and replace them.

The chair thanked the officers for putting together such a well thought out work programme.

RESOLVED to approve the draft work programme for 2017-18.

6. Mousehold Heath Update

During discussion the parks and open spaces manager answered questions. The chair and vice chair commended the officers for their proactive approach taken to assist a homeless person who had been camping on the heath. The concern was that he could light open fires and, that unless this was addressed quickly, others would be attracted to form a camp. The wardens had known who to contact and refer the man to a range of organisations where help was available to assist his situation.

The Conservators noted that there had been 30,000 volunteer work hours on the heath over the last 9 years. This reflected a lot of work that would not have been achieved if reliant on the budget available. The Conservators also noted the wide range of events that had been hosted in the last period.

Councillor Sands referred to the national “Clean for the Queen” event that had been held as part of the Queen’s 90th birthday celebrations and said that he believed that this would become a national event. The parks and open spaces manager said that he would take this up as part of the work programme and said that it would raise awareness of community involvement and keeping the heath litter free.

RESOLVED to note the report.

7. Mousehold Heath Grounds Maintenance Contract

The parks and open spaces manager presented the report and explained that following discussions with the subgroup this was an interim report and that he intended to bring a more detailed report, with a breakdown of the cost to the next meeting. The plans would be provided in colour with the next report.

In reply to a comment from the chair, the parks and open spaces manager explained that the costs for litter picking and emptying litter bins, included on costs as well as the salary of the litter picker and the costs associated with the removal of the waste from the heath.

The vice chair welcomed the opportunity to look in detail at the strategic aims and objectives and the maintenance contract going forward. It was important that the chair and Conservators had an opportunity to question the cost of elements of the contract provided in partnership with NorwichNorse (Environment) Ltd. He cautioned that as some savings could turn out to be false, it was important to consider the full detail.

RESOLVED to note:

- (1) the contents of the interim report and that there will be a further detailed report to the next meeting:
- (2) that a review of the aims and objectives and what the joint venture delivers on Mousehold Heath, will be incorporated into the Mousehold Heath Management Plan 2018-2023 planning process.

8. Pat Siano, Memorial

The chair introduced the report. The Conservators were in agreement that it was appropriate to place a plaque on the bandstand to commemorate the contribution that Pat Siano had made to Mousehold Heath as a member and chair of Mousehold Heath Defenders and as a member and vice chair of Mousehold Heath Conservators.

The parks and open spaces manager said that the Defenders had requested that the Conservators gave permission for the plaque to be placed at the band stand and for permission to hold a thanks giving service there. He explained that the arrangements for the thanks giving service were a private matter for the family in consultation with the Defenders. He advised against adding conditions to the consent to allow the family and Defenders flexibility in making their arrangements.

Clare Cohen said that it was proposed to hold the thanksgiving service on Sunday, 23 April 2017.

During discussion, it was noted that the Defenders would be making an application to the city council for a small community grant.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) record the Conservators' gratitude to Pat Siano for her work to support the conservation of Mousehold Heath, as a Mousehold Heath Defender and as a Conservator;
- (2) approve the installation of a plaque at the Fountain Ground bandstand in remembrance of Pat Siano;
- (3) agree to a thanksgiving service for Pat Siano to be held at the band stand.

9. Date of next meeting

RESOLVED to note that the next meeting will be held in the Mancroft room at City Hall at 14:00 on Friday, 17 March 2017.

CHAIR