



MOUSEHOLD HEATH CONSERVATORS

2. p.m. – 3.50 p.m.

7 October 2011

Present: Councillors Bradford (chair), Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Henderson and Little, Mrs M Bush, Mr D Cannon, and Mr C Southgate

Also Present: Members of the public were also in attendance

Apologies: Councillors George and Lay, Ms M Parker and Mr M Davies

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2011, subject to an amendment to the final sentence of the second paragraph of item four (quarterly budget report) to read:

“The annual report showed increased levels of practical work being undertaken by the wardens, which was partly due to increased access to machine tools. The more work that the wardens were able to undertake would mean less of a drain on the Conservators budget for certain practical works and the budget could be allocated to other activities.”

2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Public question one

Road safety concerns – Gurney Road - Susannah McGuire

“I represent a group of residents who are extremely concerned about the lack of a safe means of crossing Gurney Road. A considerable number of parents need to cross Gurney Road daily for their school run and of course many others need to cross the road for a variety of reasons. There is no safe means to cross the road at all, and it feels extremely dangerous doing so, especially with children and a buggy. Even the one (small) warning sign for motorists - warning of pedestrians crossing - is currently obscured by trees. We feel that there is a real need for a pedestrian crossing, both for those needing to cross the road for their daily business, but also in order to connect the two areas of Mousehold Heath and to improve accessibility.

What does the committee feel about this and could you help us in pursuing this issue?”

The chair said that the committee shared the concerns raised and that members had been actively pushing for a solution.

The head of local neighbourhood services said that the need for a safe crossing point on Gurney Road was one that had troubled the committee for some time. However the power to provide a safe crossing point was not within the powers of the committee. The Norwich highways agency committee would be responsible to allocate funding to such a scheme.

Approximately 18 months ago the conservators wrote to the chair of the Norwich highways agency committee and asked for a crossing to be provided, and received the response back that there were other locations in the city where there was a greater need for a crossing. Not satisfied with that response the committee asked for a site meeting with the chair of the Highways agency committee and local MPs and MEPs to demonstrate the unique problems caused by a road dissecting the heath. The meeting took place about a year ago and was not as productive as the committee would have liked.

There were considered to be two main stumbling blocks to providing a crossing; the visual impact that a crossing would have on the heath; and the cost. The conservators were keen that any provision was not seen as urbanising the nature of the heath while the highways engineers would need to comply with modern standards and provide signs, reflectors and other infrastructure not compatible with the environment. Even if the issues could be resolved the cost issue was a massive hurdle. When the site meeting took place the Highways agency committee had around a million pounds a year to spend on highway improvements. Following cuts to their budgets they now only had £200k a year to spend, and it looked likely that this would be the case for the next few years.

He suggested that the residents group may want to lobby the Highways agency committee, however it seemed unlikely because if they were not in a position to help a year previously with 80% less money to spend, then they would not be able to help now.

A member said that housing growth was planned for that area of the city, and that the opportunity to access growth point funding could be explored, for example to make the road a 'bus only' route.

The head of local neighbourhood services reminded the committee that they had previously been informed of The Norwich River Gateway project, as part of the Sustran's Connect2 scheme. If the existing scheme did not progress, then there could be the opportunity to invest in Mousehold heath and potentially reduce the traffic on Gurney Road.

Public question two

Vinegar pond – Alan Wright, on behalf of the previous secretary of the defenders

"I wrote a report recommending remedial work at the Vinegar. A number of the Defenders are very keen to know what the future of the pond is and I was asked to write to the Conservators on this issue.

Could we please have a formal response to the report and an indication of what is now likely to happen?"

The head of local neighbourhood services thanked Gill Webb and the Defenders on behalf of the Conservators for the recent report which substantiated much of the existing information and knowledge about the Vinegar Pond.

The Vinegar Pond was discussed by the management sub group at its meeting on 15 August 2011 (see agenda item 6). Any recommendations from officers would first be considered by the sub group who would make a recommendation to a meeting of the Conservators in due course.

The natural areas officer said that he had approached Froglife, who had expressed an interest in funding remedial work at the Vinegar Pond or for constructing a new pond at Mousehold, however, the organisation's lottery bid had been turned down. He informed members that a small grant may be available from Norfolk County Council, which would be discussed at the next sub group meeting.

Public question three

Britannia Road car park – Jim Marriage

"I often take tourist coaches to the viewing spot in front of the prison. I would like to ask the Conservators at their meeting on Friday afternoon, if their proposed alterations to the car park will make it even more difficult for coaches to turn. I know that the red open-topped tourist bus can manage fairly comfortably, but some of the coaches used by the Tourist Firms are longer and can be up to 15m long. The proposed new wooden posts and speed humps should prove to be no problem, but in the past the following have caused trouble:-

1. The bus stop post in front of the central opening to the car park has often proved to be an obstruction. Would it be possible for it to be moved along the road clear of the central opening?
2. Cars parked on the prison side of the road have also caused problems.
3. Cars parked in the car park opposite the central opening often restrict the movement of the coaches. Would it be possible to extend the car park area by a metre or two into the grassed area?

Tourism is an important industry in the city, and it would be a pity if it became impossible for tourists to enjoy the view from such an important and beautiful spot."

The community and neighbourhood manager (north) said that officers would need to investigate the ownership of the land surrounding the bus stop post. If it was possible and appropriate to re-locate the stop, officers would need to investigate who would need to give permission.

He said that officers had previously spoken to the prison property manager, who had indicated that the cars parked along Britannia Road were not prison staff and therefore their origins were not known. There were no restrictions on the stretch of

road and therefore the council and police would not have the powers to stop drivers parking there. It was reported at a previous meeting that the council were not in a position to finance new restrictions along the road.

In response to the suggestion that the car park area could be extended, he said that the Conservators would need to consider whether they supported an expansion of the car park.

RESOLVED to request an update report on the Sustran's Connect2 scheme, in relation to potential investment in Gurney Road, to a future meeting.

3. BRITANNIA ROAD CAR PARK

Chris Southgate said that he was concerned that the proposals did not link to the mousehold heath management plan objectives of ensuring that the area was managed as effectively as possible to maintain and enhance its wildlife and historic value; and promote and enhance people's access to and enjoyment of the site.

The chair read out an email received from a member of the public in response to an article in the Evening News published on 3 October 2011 titled "Clampdown planned on boy racers near mousehold heath." The email suggested that speed humps would not be an effective solution; that the speeding issue did not relate just to boy racers; that other traffic related problems included motorbikes being ridden on the pavement; and that traffic calming measures would need to apply to the whole road. The head of local neighbourhood services reminded members that the conservators could allocate their budget to the car park, however the use of the road was a wider issue and would need to be considered with the police.

The community and neighbourhood manager (north) presented the report and outlined the potential options for consideration. The proposed barriers would still allow easy access to standard cars and buses, and would predominantly restrict access to low profile vehicles. In response to members' questions, he acknowledged that not all boy racers had low hung cars and that he would also investigate whether the proposals would impact on the turning room for disabled drivers. A member of the public said that any proposals would need to consider potential negative impacts, such as relocating the parking issues to another car park on mousehold heath.

A member of the public suggested the closure of the southern part of the car park at night, to move the problem further away from the residential end. The head of local neighbourhood services said that the proposals for the car park had been developed following discussions with the police, safer neighbourhood area panels and wardens. He said that the issue of boy racers could be a seasonal issue. However, if information from the police were to show that this was not the case, he suggested that the decision on the options available should be delegated to the chair and vice chair.

Members said that further exploration of the options was required, including the impact on coach tourist access; the visual appearance of black and yellow humps; and disabled access. A site visit was also suggested.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) ask officers to further investigate the options available; and subject to whether the issue of boy racers was seasonal, delegate the decision to the chair and vice chair;
- (2) organise a site visit for members, police and surveyors, at 2pm on Friday 18 November 2011; and
- (3) review whether the litter bins could be relocated to the other side of the bollards.

4. QUARTERLY BUDGET REPORT

The finance control manager presented the report which covered five months worth of data up to 31 August 2011. He said that officers were investigating whether the general repairs and maintenance figures may have been double counted within the day-to-day repairs. Members acknowledged that there had been a reduction on the direct expenditure on vegetation expenditure due to the wardens taking on the role, help from volunteers, and the contribution of £1,500 to the contractor per year. The head of local neighbourhood services informed members that depending on the type of vegetation, some would be left on site for habitat reasons whilst other vegetation would be sold on. He said that the issue could be explored further at a sub-group meeting.

RESOLVED to note the current budget monitoring position.

5. MANAGEMENT SUB-GROUP REPORT

The head of local neighbourhood services introduced the notes from the mousehold heath working group.

Members complimented the Norwich Society which recently included the Pavilion as part of their display in the forum, encouraging the Pavillion's inclusion on the local listing of buildings. Chris Southgate, Conservator, said that the Pavilion had achieved well above the ratings/scoring threshold to secure a place within the display. Margaret Bush informed members that the county archives had not yet found any details about the property. The head of local neighbourhood services said that a report would be brought to a future meeting regarding any new arrangements for the Pavillion, including the transfer of the public toilets.

In response to members' concerns regarding the dilapidation of the Rangers house, the head of local neighbourhood services said that the council was progressing the issue due to health and safety concerns regarding the property. He said that an update could be provided to a future meeting however the conservators would not have the authority to decide the future of the house. A member suggested a compulsory purchase could be put on derelict properties.

Members thanked the defenders for the tours that they provided as part of the Fringe project on 29 September 2011 and their general help and promotion of the heath.

RESOLVED that an update report on the new arrangements for the Pavillion, including the transfer of public toilets, be brought to a future meeting.

6. MOUSEHOLD HEATH PROGRESS REPORT

The head of local neighbourhood services presented the report and said that volunteer activity had increased on previous years. He informed members that work had started on the Fountain changing rooms on 3 October 2011, and members would need to consider how they would want to celebrate and promote the improvements.

A member congratulated the successful bat walk organised on the heath and mentioned the enthusiasm of the wardens.

In response to members' questions, the head of local neighbourhood services said he would circulate an update to members regarding a court case against a motorcycle offender; and that a report outlining progress against the management plan, would be presented to members at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) to ask officers to circulate an update to members regarding a court case against a motorcycle offender; and
- (2) that a report outlining progress against the management plan, be considered at the next meeting.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED to note the dates of future meetings as follows:-

- Friday 13 January 2012 at 2.00pm
- Friday 30 March 2012 at 2.00pm

CHAIR