



MOUSEHOLD HEATH CONSERVATORS

2.00 p.m. – 4.10 p.m.

10 December 2010

Present: Councillors Brociek-Coulton and Little, Mrs M Bush and Mr C Southgate

Also Present: Several members of the Mousehold Heath Defenders and public were also in attendance

Apologies: Councillors Bradford and Collishaw, Mr D Cannon, Mr M Davies, Ms M Parker

1. NOMINATION OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

In the absence of the chair, Councillor Brociek-Coulton moved and Mrs M Bush seconded that it be:-

RESOLVED to nominate Mr Chris Southgate as Chair for the meeting.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED to

- (1) agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2010, subject to the amendment of the first paragraph in item 7 to read 'from new of the modular buildings as decided upon at the last meeting on 18 June 2010;' and
- (2) agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2010.

3. INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW CONTRACTORS

Bob Cronk, head of local neighbourhood services introduced Tony Ash from Servest (previously Sherwood), the new contractor responsible for cleaning the public conveniences including those on Mousehold Heath and included cleaning and replenishment of consumables, once a day, seven days a week. The contractor was keen to work with the council to continue to improve services. Monthly meetings would be held between the contractor and the council to review any incidences, monitor the contract and improve service provision. Members were encouraged to inform the contractor if they had any issues or comments. The committee considered that it would be useful to receive a performance report of the contractor

in relation to the Mousehold Heath area. The report could include faults and compliments, to highlight any trends, although the management of the contract should be left to the council.

In response to a question from the conservators, the contractor said that it was not possible to measure the level of use of the facilities on Mousehold Heath. The contractor had already received comment regarding improved cleanliness of the facilities near Zaks.

David Mingay, contracts manager, informed the conservators that Eamonn Pellican, facilities manager was the contract manager for public conveniences, whilst the contract officer and Paul Holley, natural areas officer, would be responsible for the management of the grounds maintenance contract on the heath (including litter bins and grass cutting).

In response to a question, the contracts manager said that the EPA crew (2 people and a vehicle) would be responsible for removing fly-tipping throughout the city. It was reported that fly-tipping had not been much of an issue so far during 2010-11.

The council would be installing a new contact system which would enable the public to contact the council using the local dial code for Norwich. It was suggested that contact numbers for any concerns regarding the heath should be made more prominent in the area and available at all access points.

The chair thanked the officers and contractors for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) consider a performance report for a future meeting on the contracts in relation to the Mousehold Heath area;
- (2) ask the contracts manager to provide a short booklet of plans to show areas that the contract covers (for example what was to be maintained and when);
- (3) invite Fountains contractors into a future meeting;
- (4) provide figures to the conservators regarding the total tonnage of waste removed from the heath in the past year and the associated costs;
- (5) ensure that contact numbers for any concerns regarding the heath are made more prominent in the area, including at access points; and
- (6) provide a list of key contacts and numbers for members of the committee.

4. QUARTERLEY BUDGET REPORT – APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2010

The head of neighbourhood services presented the report which was circulated at the meeting. He explained that the council's finance system monitored budgets on 12 month forecasts. For example the forecast year end overspend on salaries, would be due to more hours worked in the summer, which in reality would be much less as winter progresses. In this case, the spend should be much closer to the budget by the end of the financial year.

The committee would be reviewing the budget precept at the January 2011 meeting, which would also provide more up-to-date data on current spend. Any under-spend would be retained in the budget for the following year.

In response to members' questions, he said that the tree works figures reflected the majority of work having been completed in the summer and that more accurate figures would be available in the next budget sheet. Advertising spend was low and it was suggested that the budget be consolidated into a broader publicity budget code.

RESOLVED to note the current budget monitoring position.

5. PRESENTATION ON THE MOUSEHOLD HEATH BUDGET

The head of neighbourhood services provided a presentation regarding the context of the Mousehold Heath budget and the challenges around setting the budget precept for 2011/12. He explained how the council finances worked; the impact of the recession on the council's budget; the council's cost reduction programme; the likely impact of the comprehensive spending review (CSR) and the council's medium term financial strategy.

Although the CSR report was published in October 2010 this was of a high level and the revenue support grant (RSG) settlement was to be announced during December 2010. The head of finance anticipated this would result in a reduction in funding by 28%.

If the Conservators were to follow the council's estimated savings required for 2011-12, it would need to consider making an estimated saving of 6.29% to the Mousehold Heath budget for 2011/12 (a reduction of £12,166). To meet this reduction, and presuming that the conservators wished to retain the staffing level, he suggested a reduction in the day works budget and works budget – the affects of which would be less noticeable to the public. He also suggested the need to clearly identify a contingency budget to cover any issues which could arise throughout the year, which if not used, could be carried forward into the next financial year.

In response to a member's question regarding the flexibility of the contracts, he said that the cost of the grounds and cleaning contracts were being delivered at a reduced cost to the year before. The Mousehold Heath budget was also not being charged for the EPA work and fly-tipping service. He said he would speak to the contracts manager regarding the flexibility of the contracts and the possibility of moving resource around to reduce the level of service and therefore cost to the Mousehold Heath budget.

The Chair and members of the committee said that in broad terms, they would endeavour to be responsible and take into account the council's budget situation. They would take a percentage of the cuts although the exact percentage of cuts would be based on the government information on the revenue support grant once released.

In the future, it could be possible to apply for funding from other bodies. The natural areas officer said that two current agri-environment schemes under Natural England, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (which applied to a small area of Mousehold

Heath), and the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme would soon be superseded by the 'Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.' Post 2012 could see a much larger area of Mousehold Heath eligible for some of these grant schemes due to the conservation management work undertaken over the last few years. He said he would also be approaching the local Forestry Commission office to explore the possibility of accessing funding from the Woodland Grant Scheme, which would help develop and manage the woodlands into a more robust condition.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) ask the head of local neighbourhood services to present a full report on the draft budget and work plan for 2011/12 to the next meeting on 14 January 2011;
- (2) ask the contracts manager to explore the level of flexibility built into the contracts regarding the possible reallocation of resources away from Mousehold Heath; and
- (3) ask the natural areas officer to keep the conservators informed regarding access to external funding sources.

6. FEEDBACK ON GURNEY ROAD SITE VISIT

The natural areas officer provided members with an oral update on the visit to Gurney Road on 19 November 2010 which MEPs, the local MP and county councillors also attended. The site visit aimed to identify possible solutions to the road crossing and traffic management on Gurney Road. All in attendance were sympathetic to the situation but no firm conclusions were drawn regarding solutions or funding. One MEP had suggested that the traffic calming measures could be part of a European funding bid, which could also include habitat management and car park investment.

The chair suggested that a proposal was required, including an outline of the case and the identification of other heath areas requiring improvement. It would also be necessary to identify what funding programmes were available, identify the most likely one and the criteria which would need to be met.

A Conservator indicated that it may have been more productive if the MEPs/MPs had been briefed before the site visit so that they understood the context and the scale of the budget available. Ideas had included widening of the road, placing gates along the verge of the road, or a pinch point which allowed one car through at a time. It would be preferable that any traffic calming measures should not look visibly urban and that consideration should be given to the impact any changes to the road layout could have on traffic flow in other parts of the city.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the natural areas officer explore when and why Gurney road was adopted to a public highway;
- (2) the head of neighbourhood services and the sub group contact Joanne Deverick, transport manager regarding the traffic calming options available for Gurney Road; and

- (3) to investigate what European grant options were available and identify the criteria which would need to be met.

7. MANAGEMENT SUB-GROUP REPORT

The head of neighbourhood services presented the report and said that a presentation on the principles and management of the neighbourhood working model would be brought to a future meeting.

In response to a member's comments regarding the laying of carpet for skateboarding on the heath and associated litter, he said that the safer neighbourhood team or EPA could be instructed to make regular visits to clear the area.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) note the management sub-group report; and
- (2) ask the natural areas officer to identify whether there was a need for regular visits to the heath from the safer neighbourhood team or EPA.

8. MOUSEHOLD HEATH MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The natural areas officer presented the report and said that the restoration of the Calvary track looked very good. A flagpole was to be lifted and could provide the opportunity for publicity via the media. Members of the conservators thanked all of the defenders and other volunteers for their hard work over the years.

Further hardcopies of the Mousehold Heath management plan were to be printed, and the plan was also available online.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) note the contents of the report; and
- (2) thank the defenders and volunteers for all the hard work on the heath over the years.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

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

- Friday 14 January 2011 at 2.00pm (additional meeting to look at Budget Precept for 2011/2012)
- Friday 11 March 2011 at 2.00pm

CHAIR