



Mousehold Heath Conservators

14:30 to 15:40

19 January 2024

Present: Councillors Sands (M) (chair), Peek (vice chair), Carrington, Champion, Fox, Kendrick and Kidman, and Marion Maxwell (Mousehold Heath Defenders) and Willem Buttinger (Norwich Society)

Apologies: Councillors Francis and Lubbock

In attendance Matthew Davies – Fringe project officer
William Stewart, Mousehold Heath Warden
Mark Brzeczek – project manager - delivery
Councillor Giles, cabinet member for communities and social inclusion

1. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

3. Minutes

Subject to noting that Councillor Carrington was present at the meeting and that under item 6. Mousehold Heath work programme 2023-24, the Mousehold Heath Defenders representative had helped to facilitate the illustrated talk rather than held the illustrated talked it was:-

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2023.

4. Mousehold Heath budget monitoring to 30 November 2023

The cabinet member for communities and social inclusion presented the report. There was a forecasted underspend of £973 for the financial year 2024/25 due to income being higher than budgeted for. The large capital reserves position was due to the sale of the Ranger's House. Any approved upgrades to the public toilets would be paid for from capital reserves. The recharge for the services provided by Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL) was still to take place and would be reflected in future budget monitoring reports.

RESOLVED to note the current budget monitoring and reserves positions.

5. Mousehold Heath Conservators Budget and Precept 2024/25

The cabinet member for communities and social inclusion presented the report. The proposed budget and precept for Mousehold Heath Conservators for the financial year 2024/25 was £277,611 which represented a 4.3% increase to the budget for 2023/24. Table 2 within the report provided details on the proposed increases and the reasons for these. An increase of 7.5% was proposed to the fees and charges.

The chair commented it was positive to see that the balance level of the reserves continued to exceed the minimum prudent balance.

The Fringe Project officer said that a request had been made by the Mousehold Heath Wardens to move £400 from the Projects budget code to the Refreshments budget code. This budget paid for refreshments for the volunteers as a thank you for their work on Mousehold Heath and due to the rise in inflation the cost of these had risen significantly. The Conservators were supportive of this reallocation of money to show their gratitude to the volunteers.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:-

- 1) Move £400 from Projects budget code to Refreshments budget code; and
- 2) Place a precept of £277,611 on Norwich City Council for the financial year 2024/25.

6. Mousehold Heath Management Update – 29 August 2023 to 4 January 2024

The Fringe Project officer introduced his new position on the committee. Through a restructure he had assumed the responsibility for the Mousehold Heath Wardens. He continued to manage the Fringe Project which delivered projects across the city, including on Mousehold Heath.

The Mousehold Heath Warden presented the report. He highlighted that a total of 1125 community volunteer hours had been undertaken by a variety of groups on the Heath by a range of organisations and individuals. The volunteers were crucial to the management of the Heath. The two benches that had been donated by the Mousehold Heath Defenders had now been installed.

Following a tree safety inspection, 25 trees were identified as dead, dying or dangerous and these had to be cut down by the Warden and the Eason College work placement student. A number of overhanging branches also had been cleared to maintain access for emergency vehicles and clear cycle paths. Through the support of the Conservators, the work placement student had been able to take part in training courses to aid in his development.

Habitat management continued to be ongoing and during the autumn cutting of the Anthills, Gilman Road and Desert meadows had taken place. These were now either cut by electric brush cutters or scythes. The use of scythes for these cuts was

increasing as these were carbon neutral and more sensitive to wildlife due to the decrease in vibrations that could disturb wildlife.

A number of events had taken place on the Heath. The programme of guided walks on the Heath had concluded in October with the last walk being a Fungi Foray. This had allowed for the recording of fungi species on the Heath including a number of species that were new to the site which would be confirmed by a specialist at the county council. There had also been a wildlife walk in December which had focussed on winter birds. Several different birds had been spotted including a Peregrin Falcon. Mousehold Heath had hosted two Heritage Open Day walks in September, and these had focused on the history and environmental importance of the site. These had been well received by attendees. The chair proposed that the Conservators' thanks should be recorded for the work of the experts who had conducted the Heritage Open Days trails.

A member queried whether the Wardens had seen similar trends to other organisations in regard to the level of volunteering during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Warden said they had seen an initial drop in the number of volunteers in the pandemic but in the last six to eight months the number of volunteers had returned to pre-pandemic levels. There also continued to be enquiries from individuals and organisations to volunteer on the Heath which were always welcomed.

In response to a member's question the Fringe Project officer said that the criteria for the Green Flag award did not change year on year and was available on their website to view. The Warden confirmed that the city council applied for the status on an annual basis and the Green Flag committee would visit the site every other year to inspect the site.

A member asked for an update on the Mustard and Vinegar ponds. The Warden confirmed that fish had again been found in the Vinegar pond. There were plans to humanely remove as many fish as possible during the winter. If this approach did not work other approaches would be explored in the management subgroup and reported to the Conservators at a future meeting.

A member asked whether there had been a decrease in illegal activity on the Heath. The Warden confirmed that there had been a decline, and they would continue to work closely with Norfolk Constabulary and the North Norwich Community Safety Group on this.

In response to a member's question the Warden said that installing a permanent camera near the Pitch and Putt car park to prevent or prosecute fly-tipping would be expensive. The cabinet member for communities and social inclusion said that any request for a redeployable CCTV camera would be assessed in terms of need in relation to other areas. The chair commented that in other local authorities wildlife cameras had been used, and this could be an option to explore. The Norwich Society representative said that he was aware of these having been used successfully to prosecute those committing fly-tipping as they could be hidden. The chair said that they could explore this as an option in future. The cabinet member for communities and social inclusion said that the report on LOVE Norwich that would be brought to the scrutiny committee on 25 January 2024 would address some of these issues. The Warden said that the Wardens could record the instances of fly-tipping and create a map of hotspots.

The chair asked whether the Easton College work placement student was still working with the Mousehold Heath Wardens. The Warden said the student had completed 150 hours the previous year and would be completing another 150 hours in the current year as he was completing an arboricultural course at Easton College.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the contents of the Mousehold Heath Management Update – 29 August 2023 to 4 January 2024; and
- 2) Record the Mousehold Heath Conservators' thanks to the experts who had conducted the Heritage Open Days trails.

7. Mousehold Heath annual works programme 2024-25

The Mousehold Heath Warden presented the report. The works programme included ongoing works that were linked to the Mousehold Heath management plan and changes that had been agreed in 2023-24. There were no planned amendments in 2024-25. Progress against the plan for 2023-24 would be reported to the meeting of the Mousehold Heath Conservators in March 2024.

A member queried what the "Access hubs" were. In response the Warden said that the access hubs were the arrival points for visitors including the car parks. Within the 10-year plan the access hubs would be reviewed in the following years. The cabinet member for communities and social inclusion said that the 10-year plan could be circulated to Mousehold Heath Conservators.

The chair asked whether anything had been done regarding the damage to the Mottram Memorial information plaque. The Warden said the information plaque had been patched but the Conservators would need to consider whether a different material should be used. The chair considered that this option was worth exploring at a future meeting.

In response to a member's question the chair said that while the closure order for the Britannia Road car park had now ended there was a citywide Public Space Protection Order which dealt with vehicular anti-social behaviour. The Conservators could monitor the situation to see if other measures would be needed.

A member queried whether £200 was sufficient for providing and maintaining cycle stands. The Warden confirmed that this figure was the average spend over a number of years and consideration could be given to the locations of the cycle stands in future.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Agree the contents of the annual works programme for 2024/25; and
- 2) Agree to the financial commitments made within the management plan objectives to deliver the works outlined in the work programme keeping within budget for 2024/25 financial year.

8. Mousehold Heath toilet refurbishment

(This item was contained within the supplementary agenda.)

The cabinet member for communities and social inclusion presented the report. The current building next to Zak's Restaurant was not suitable for a Changing Places toilet, as it did not meet minimum size requirements for such a facility. It was proposed to turn the male toilets into a unisex toilet and refurbish the existing accessible toilet. This included introducing an electrical supply by sub-metering from Zak's Restaurant. The Conservators had previously requested a Changing Places toilet was created on Mousehold Heath and it was therefore proposed to engage an external consultant to conduct a feasibility study to identify a possible location for a Changing Places toilet. The project manager – delivery said that the proposal as laid out within the report included external refurbishments and the internal works required. The current male toilet would be large enough for an accessible toilet but would require the door to be widened and for level access to be created. This would be an additional cost to the total provided within the report.

A member queried whether any studies had been conducted to understand how many people would use a Changing Places facility to ensure that there would be sufficient usage of such a facility. The chair commented that former Councillor Bradford had been a wheelchair user and regularly visited Mousehold Heath. Another member commented that Changing Places facilities were used by other individuals and not just wheelchair users.

A member commented that the access to the toilets could be difficult due to the steepness of the incline and due to the surface of the incline, and said that the Conservators could consider looking at the access to the toilets in future. The chair said that it was possible for vehicles to drive closer to Zak's Restaurant to allow a wheelchair user to use the accessible toilet and therefore access to the toilets could stay at the current level.

A member queried whether the Conservators should delay the refurbishment of the toilets next to Zak's Restaurant until the feasibility study had been completed and use some of the budget allocated to this project on a fully accessible facility. The chair said that the current toilets needed to be refurbished to ensure public toilet provision for visitors to Mousehold Heath. In response to a member's query the project manager – delivery said that he would need to confirm the length of time required for the feasibility study.

Members discussed the need for the toilets to be refurbished and were pleased to see that a feasibility study would be conducted to find a suitable location for a Changing Places toilet.

The cabinet member for communities and social inclusion said that the Mousehold Heath Conservators work on refurbishing the toilets had been ongoing for a number of years and the proposal would allow for the refurbishment of the toilets to commence. The provision of toilets within a park would be helpful with being awarded the Green Flag status. Individual Changing Places toilet blocks could cost around £90,000 and the level of capital reserves of the Conservators would not be sufficient for this. The external consultants would be able to explore options for sources of funding. A member commented that the feasibility study would need to

explore the level of demand for a Changing Places facility and the justification for such a facility based on a demand.

Councillor Kendrick moved and Councillor Kidman seconded a procedural motion to move to the vote.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to move to the vote.

RESOLVED, unanimously, that:

- 1) The existing male toilets are changed to a single unisex toilet and the existing male disabled toilet is refurbished as detailed in section 8, of the report, at an estimated cost of £36,679.20, including a 20% contingency
- 2) An external consultant is engaged to conduct a feasibility study to identify:
 - a. The optimum location for a Changing Places facility within Mousehold Heath, having regard to the needs of visitors to Mousehold Heath and accessibility
 - b. The enabling works required for the preferred location, e.g. access and utilities; and
 - c. A cost estimate for such a facility
- 3) The refurbishment of the toilets should include LED lighting, hygienic PVC clad walls, non-slip flooring, water heater, hand dryer and a stainless steel toilet, wash hand basin, grab rails and a baby changing station.

CHAIR