



MOUSEHOLD HEATH CONSERVATORS

2pm – 4.35pm

13 January 2012

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

Also Present: Members of the public were also in attendance

Apologies: Councillors Bradford, Henderson and Ms M Parker

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2011.

2. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

The natural areas officer presented the report. The chair highlighted the positive increase in volunteer work and that the wardens were able to complete more of the repair work. Members discussed the necessity to include an action to co-ordinate a style and design for signage across Mousehold Heath, into the work programme. This would include directional and interpretational signage.

The natural areas officer provided a background on the higher level stewardship scheme. He explained that if the application to join the scheme was successful, Mousehold Heath would receive funding to assist areas to revert back to heath land. It could also enhance access to additional funding for habitat works and historical and archaeological aspects of the heath.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) include an action on the work programme to co-ordinate the design of signage across Mousehold Heath; and
- (2) approve the work programme for 2012/13.

3. BUDGET MONITORING STATEMENT APRIL – NOVEMBER 2011

The finance control manager presented the report. The head of local neighbourhood services explained that there would likely be an underspend of the day to day repairs budget by approximately £16,000 which would influence the reserves to take forward

into the next year. He advised that the conservators may wish to take this into account when setting the precept for 2012/13.

In response to conservators' questions, he said that the climate was the main risk to the site such as the potential of big storm events and the risk of fire due to the current continued dry weather. Councillor Bremner said that previously, part of the heath boundary was lost to a local property because an area had been fenced off for over 12 years. This could be a potential risk. The head of local neighbourhood services said that boundary walks had not taken place and that consideration could be given to formally recording the boundary.

The chair said that he was concerned that inflationary prices of the long-term Fountain contract would have to be met, whilst the remainder of the budget would need to be squeezed. He said that flexibility should be built into future contracts. The head of local neighbourhood services said that the contract was moving into its 3rd year of a 5 year term and that work would start next year to review.

RESOLVED to note the current budget monitoring position.

4. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2012/13

The head of local neighbourhood services said that the subject headings had been amended to make them more user friendly and views from the Conservators would be welcomed.

The finance control manager presented the report and highlighted that the Mousehold Heath underspend could be considered when approving any additional expenditure and setting the budget precept. The head of local neighbourhood services requested the Conservators to be mindful of the financial pressures on the council when setting the budget precept.

The Conservators were keen to support the council and considered a prudent minimum balance for reserves to be maintained by the Mousehold Heath budget. The finance control manager advised that a prudent level of reserves for the overall council would be in the region of 5-10% of the overall budget, however risks to the Mousehold Heath budget would be different to the overall council. In response to a question from Chris Southgate about whether there could be an unpredictable increase in costs in the future, he said that officers were confident that the only variances within the salaries budget would be due to sickness or overtime costs.

The head of local neighbourhood services thanked the Conservators for their consideration towards the wider financial situation of the council.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) approve the 2012/13 budgets as set out in option two of appendix A, subject to setting the budget spend at £195,374 (to include an additional £4,000 likely spend on day to day repairs);
- (2) place a budget precept on Norwich City Council of £181,095 for the financial year beginning 1 April 2012; and
- (3) note the risk management arrangements set out in paragraphs 15-18 of the report.

5. MANAGEMENT SUB-GROUP REPORT

The chair introduced the report and thanked the Mousehold Heath Defenders for their £1,000 donation towards the Vinegar Pond. The natural areas officer said that an experimental approach had been taken to the lining on the Vinegar Pond, and if successful, it would be extended across the entire pond basin. Good progress had been monitored so far and a good depth of water remained despite the low rainfall.

Two quotes were being sourced to repair the Mottram Memorial. The head of local neighbourhood services said that any spend could be delegated to the chair and vice chair, however he advised that the quotes be fed back to the management sub-group. Chris Southgate informed the Conservators that the Norwich Society would like to be kept informed of how the quotes were progressing and that they may consider making a financial contribution to the plaque. Also, the Octagon Chapel had shown an interest in par-taking in a reopening event and would like to be kept informed of progress.

RESOLVED to note the management sub-group report.

6. MOUSEHOLD HEATH UPDATE REPORT

The chair introduced the report and thanked all those involved in the activities on mousehold heath.

In response to a question from Chris Southgate regarding the Fountain Ground changing rooms, the natural areas officer explained that teams had been accommodated on other sites and that not many fixtures had been cancelled or rearranged. Once the changing rooms were complete, the wardens would be involved with promotion of the facilities and wider use of the site. Councillor Brociek-Coulton suggested the use of posters on boards within Sewell to encourage use of the fields. Consideration would need to be given to the formal opening of the facility, including inviting the Sheriff or Lord Mayor. The head of local neighbourhood services informed the committee that a meeting had been arranged with the contractor to discuss the lack of completion. Options would be considered such as forcing completion by the contractor; or the council completing the works and then recharging the cost to the contractor.

RESOLVED to note the Mousehold Heath update report.

7. NORWICH CONNECT 2 – NOMINATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER GROUP

(The city growth and development programme co-ordinator, cycling and landscape officer and senior planner (transport) attended the meeting for this item)

(A map of the alternative Norwich Connect 2 cycling network was circulated at the meeting)

The city growth and development programme co-ordinator provided a presentation to the Conservators on the options available for the cycling network, which would improve traffic management on Gurney Road. Tight timescales applied to the Norwich Connect 2 funding. The route would need to be in place by March 2013 and

therefore built during Autumn 2012. Proposed traffic calming and revised speed limits would need to be consulted on before consideration at the Norwich highways agency committee (NHAC) in May 2012. Due to the council's elections in May 2012, and the associated purdah period, public consultation on the proposals would need to take place in March 2012. He requested feedback on the proposals and nominations for a representative from the conservators to join a consultation group to discuss proposals as they develop. The group would meet on a bi-monthly basis with the first meeting taking place at 4.30pm on Tuesday 31 January 2012 at Sewell Park College.

The senior planner (transport) provided a detailed explanation of the options available and the proposal to reduce the statutory speed limit to 20mph. To enable a shared cycle/footpath, a section of the existing path on Gurney Road would need to be widened by 1.5m. Option one would be to widen the path into the heath, enabling a pedestrian refuge (crossing) to be installed; option two would be to narrow the road and use raised tables (which would create a natural traffic calming solution); option three would be to combine options one and two, to narrow the road but widen the path into the heath at a single point to enable a pedestrian refuge.

Chris Southgate said that the conservators were keen to apply traffic calming to the area but with a sympathetic approach and subtle designs to maintain the natural environment and avoid urbanisation of the area. The senior planner (transport) stated that the overall budget for the project stood at £115,000 and that all safety and highways standards must be met when considering the design options.

Councillor Brociek-Coulton said that a pedestrian refuge could make it safer for school children to get the heath. The senior planner (transport) informed the conservators that the reduction of the statutory speed limit should improve overall public safety. In general, members supported option two as outlined above.

The cycling and landscape officer outlined the design approach to the Valley Drive cycle/footpath. He proposed the use of materials sympathetic to the heath; a path at 2.5m wide to enable dual use; timber edging; and solar panel path LEDs (to demarcate the line of the path). Chris Southgate was concerned that the surface options were not suitable. However, in general, the conservators were fairly supportive of the design proposals and said that over time, the surface would merge in and it would be durable and result in reduced maintenance costs over the long term. The improvements would increase usability of the stretch for cyclists.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) support option two as outlined above; and
- (2) nominate Chris Southgate to represent the Mousehold Heath Conservators on the Norwich Connect 2 consultation group to discuss the proposals as they develop.

8. PLAQUE ON MOUSEHOLD HEATH

Councillor Brociek-Coulton informed the conservators that David Bradford, as chair, had agreed for a bench seat to be placed on the Desert wild flower meadow on Gilman Road in memory of Mr Grant, following receipt of a letter from a member of public.

RESOLVED to note the above.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED to note the date of the next meeting at 2pm on Friday 30 March 2012.

CHAIR