

**Minutes of the Meeting of the EPSOM AND WALTON DOWNS CONSERVATORS
held on 7 October 2015**

PRESENT -

Councillor Liz Frost (Chairman); Andrew Cooper (Epsom Downs Racecourse) (Vice-Chairman); Councillor Lucie Dallen, Councillor Robert Foote, Councillor Jan Mason, Nigel Whybrow (Epsom Downs Racecourse) and Councillor Clive Woodbridge

In Attendance:

Absent: Councillor Rekha Bansil, Simon Dow (Horserace Betting Levy Board) and Simon Durrant (Epsom Downs Racecourse)

Officers present: Sam Beak (Downs Manager), Lee Duffy (Head of Financial Services), Bob Harding (Head Downskeeper), Tim Richardson (Democratic Services Officer), Samantha Whitehead (Streetcare Manager) and Simon Young (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators held on 17 June 2015 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

12 ITEMS OF INTEREST DISCUSSED BY THE TRAINING GROUNDS MANAGEMENT BOARD (TGMB)

The following items of interest had been discussed at the last meeting of the Training Grounds Management Board (held on 5 October 2015).

- a) Hatched area at the foot of Walton Downs. The TGMB had considered that it had no reason to change its current stance with regard to the Hatched Area, and reconfirmed that it could not authorise the use of the Hatched Area for hack riding. The Conservators were informed that signs informing Downs users that the hatched area was not open for hack riding had been placed at the location by the TGMB.
- b) Warning signs near traffic lights for the horse crossing in front of the Queens Stand. The TGMB had discussed the need for warning signs near the traffic lights for the horse crossing in front of the Queens Stand, to alert motorists. The TGMB would raise this matter with the Surrey County Council Highways Service.

- c) Warning lights on Burgh Heath Road. The Downs Manager reminded the Conservators that it had previously been proposed by the TGMB that the equestrian warning lights currently located on Burgh Heath Road be relocated elsewhere on the Downs. It was noted that the TGMB would speak to Surrey County Council Highways Service regarding this in conjunction with warning signs for the Queens Stand crossing (see b) above).
- d) Proposed wording of new dog walking signs. The TGMB had considered wording of proposed signs to inform dog walkers keep dogs on leads. The Conservators considered this item under the next item on the agenda, "Matters arising from previous meetings and other items of interest".

13 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS AND OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

- a) Hack Sand Track, foot of Walton Downs. The Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Conservators that a written report regarding this matter would be presented to the next meeting.
- b) Downs House. The Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Conservators that the sale of Downs House had been completed, and that it was now in private ownership.
- c) Epsom Golf Club unauthorised development and other matters. The Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Conservators that a written report regarding this matter would be presented to the next meeting.
- d) Access to the Tattenham Corner Road crossing for pedestrians walking from Tattenham Corner Station. The Vice Chairman informed the Conservators that this issue had been considered by the Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee during its Downs Tour held on the 1 October. During the Committee's visit to the location, Angela Clifford, representative of the Epsom Civic Society had suggested that the Racecourse running rail running parallel to Tattenham Corner Road on the eastern side of the road be reversed to provide more space for pedestrians. This had been implemented by the Racecourse, in addition to the protruding end sections of other rails also being removed. These works had improved pedestrian access for the area, but the Racecourse would continue to monitor the issue. The Downs Manager informed the Conservators that she had requested Surrey County Council Highways Service to provide its opinion of the location.
- e) Dog control on the Downs. The Conservators received draft wording for new dog walking information signs which had been proposed by the Training Grounds Management Board. The Streetcare Manager informed the Conservators that she had now received a copy of a report commissioned by the Training Grounds Management Board with regard to dog control.

The Conservators were informed that the Training Grounds Management Board proposed to replace all existing dog walking information signs on the Downs with the new design once it had been approved. The Conservators considered the visual design and content of the sign, and expressed support for its introduction. Elements of the sign required further consideration prior to its final approval, and it was suggested that the Chairman and Clerk be authorised to approve them.

The Conservators considered the proposed wording for the dog walking information signs and agreed:

- To authorise the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman to approve the final wording and design.
- f) Gypsy Site Management arrangements. The Chairman informed the Conservators that she had held a meeting with the Downs Manager, Streetcare Manager and Mr Simon Durrant regarding arrangements for the Derby Gypsy Site's management. The meeting had considered the views expressed at meetings of the Conservators, Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee and by local residents with regard to the issue.

The meeting had considered previous proposals to increase the height and sturdiness of fencing for the site, but considered that this should not be recommended as it was likely to be perceived as a challenge to be overcome by some users of the site. The clearance of scrub and vegetation from neighbouring woodland had also been discussed. It had been considered that this should also not be recommended, as it was unlikely to discourage their use as a toilet. Vegetation clearance at this location might also encourage some users of the site to attempt to make vehicular access to other parts of the Downs.

The Chairman informed the Conservators that the meeting had also considered the possibility of seeking an alternative (security) company to manage the site in future years, but considered that this should not be recommended, as it would be highly expensive, yet unlikely to provide a better environment. It was noted that the current Gypsy Site Manager was a member of the gypsy and traveller community who was employed by the Conservators to manage the site. The meeting had also noted that opening the site a day early had in some years been permitted in order to assist in resolving issues elsewhere in the Borough, and recommended that this should continue to be considered when appropriate.

The Chairman informed the Conservators that those present at the meeting had expressed the opinion that whilst not perfect, the current site arrangements were the best option available. The Conservators noted this verbal report from the Chairman, and that Officers would continue to work with the site manager to attempt to improve the situation.

- g) Number of verbal reports provided. It was noted that the agenda papers issued for the meeting had listed 6 matters within this item as being for verbal update at the meeting. A member of the Conservators expressed frustration at this and requested that written updates should be provided whenever possible. The Chairman informed the Conservators that due to the scheduling of meetings of the Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee and Training Grounds Management Board being in close proximity to that of the Conservators, it had not been possible to include written updates when the agenda papers were published.

14 REPORT OF THE HEAD DOWNSKEEPER

The Conservators received the report of the Head Downskeeper. The following matters were considered:

- a) Racing programme live music nights in 2015 and 2016. The Conservators noted that the only difficulties experienced by the Downskeepers with regard to crowds at Epsom Live! Music nights during the 2015 race season had been on 9 July, when Madness were the performer. A large crowd had gathered on the Hill at that event, despite the Racecourse not providing any facilities or encouraging attendance there. It was noted that Surrey Police had maintained a presence throughout the event.

The Vice-Chairman informed the Conservators that currently the Racecourse did not intend to hold any live music events on the Downs in 2016, to enable works to be undertaken to the Duchess's Stand Roof.

- b) Winter Work Programme. The Conservators noted that the cutting back of scrub near the top of Riflebutts Alley and cutting back of vegetation at the Langley Vale entrances to the Downs had been allocated high priorities within the Programme. The Vice Chairman informed the Committee that the works listed on the programme as clearance of large gorse at top of Middle Hill was of importance, as vegetation at the location impaired sightlines for crowds viewing the racing. It was agreed that the priority of this work would be raised.
- c) Woods at bottom of Gypsy site. The Conservators agreed that this location should not be cut back or thinned out. Additional discussion regarding this matter was held under the item titled "Matters arising from previous meetings and other items of interest" of this meeting (see Minute 13 f)).

15 MID-YEAR BUDGET MONITORING

The Conservators received a report advising it of income and expenditure in 2015/16 as at 30 September 2015, and seeking guidance on the preparation of the budget and precept for 2016/17. An updated Risk Register for the Downs, for (2015/16) was circulated at the meeting.

The Conservators noted that it was proposed to increase precept contributions by 4%. The Council's Head of Financial Services informed the Conservators that

this was proposed due to the increased pension costs incurred by the Conservators following the de-pooling of Surrey County Council's Smaller Bodies fund. The Conservators were informed that there was a forecast £18,440 use of the working balance in the current year, and that there had been a £15,000 use of it in 2014-15. The Head of Financial Services informed the Conservators that this was not sustainable, and that a 4% increase was proposed to assist in addressing this.

The Head of Financial Services also informed the Conservators that an external audit of the Conservators' 2014/15 accounts had identified one issue, which was a discrepancy of one pound. This had occurred due to rounding of calculations.

The Conservators considered the mid-year 2015-16 budget monitoring statement attached as an annexe to the report, and following queries regarding the headings under which income from event hire charges and metal detecting permits were listed, it was noted that the Head of Financial Services would look into the matter and provide a more detailed breakdown for future reports.

Following consideration, the Conservators agreed:

- to note the mid-year income and expenditure position as at 30 September 2015;
- to support the proposed 4% increase in precept contributions for 2016-17, for consideration at their meeting in January 2015. The Conservators noted that this level of increase was proposed due to the increased pension costs incurred as a result of changes to the administration of the pension fund;
- to note the 2015/16 Risk Register for the Downs.

16 EXTENSION OF 1ST TEE AND NEW PATHS ON EPSOM GOLF COURSE

The Conservators received a report presenting a proposal from Epsom Golf Club for vegetation clearance, tee extension and creation of a new path for the 1st hole of the Golf Course, and creation of a new path between the 11th and 12th Tee of the Golf Course.

Following consideration of the report, the Conservators agreed:

- the proposal submitted by Epsom Golf Club to extend the 1st tee and construct a new path as detailed within the report, including vegetation clearance as proposed.
- the proposal from Epsom Golf Club for a new path from the 11th Green to the 12th tee.

17 EPSOM GOLF CLUB - WINTER TEES PROPOSAL

The Conservators received a report presenting a proposal from Epsom Golf Club to replace Winter Tees on seven holes (2nd, 3rd, 8th, 10th, 16th, 17th) of the Golf Course.

The Conservators were informed by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that if approval were granted for the proposal, it would not create any precedent with regard to the ongoing consideration of unauthorised works on the Golf Course (a practice area near the 18th hole – also considered in Minute 13 c), above). The Conservators considered the size of the proposed tee mats, and were informed that officers did not consider them to be excessively large. It was noted that the tee mats would be permanent, and would not be removed in summer months.

Following consideration of the report, the Conservators agreed:

- to the proposal from Epsom Golf Club to replace Winter Tees on the 2nd, 3rd, 8th, 10th, 16th, 17th and 18th Holes of the Golf Course, and to grant permission to the works under Byelaw 2 (i) (e). It was noted that this approval was subject to planning permission from the Local Authority Planning Department.

18 EVENTS ON THE DOWNS

The Conservators received a report presenting details of event requests for consideration. The Downs Manager informed the Conservators that in addition to the events listed within the report, a late request had been received from a young-persons' cross-country running league for several dates. This application had been received late, after the deadline contained within the Event Management Strategy, which the event organiser had previously been advised of. It was noted that the event organiser had previously held the event on the Downs, with no issues having been experienced as a result. Following consideration, the Conservators expressed that whilst they did not wish to enable the late submission of applications in the future, they felt that in this instance authority to consider the application should be delegated to the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman following the meeting. The Conservators expressed that they wished to support sporting activities for young people, but that it was important that the deadlines within the Event Management Strategy be adhered to. The Downs Manager was requested to inform the applicant that late applications would not be considered in the future.

Following consideration, the Conservators agreed:

- to grant approval to the following events on the Downs:
 - Epsom College Cross Country Event – Thursday 19 November 2015;
 - Royal Pigeon Racing Association Pigeon Liberations – various dates from March – October 2016;
 - The 77th Pioneer Run for Veteran Motorcycles - Sunday 20 March 2016;
 - North Cheam Baptist Church - Sunday 27 March 2016;
 - Rotary Club of Epsom Sponsored Walk - Sunday 8 May 2016;

- Round the Borough Bike - Sunday 15 May 2016;
- Cancer Research UK: Race For Life - Sunday 26 June 2016;
- Round the Borough Hike - Saturday 3 September 2016;
- to note the Calendar of Events for 2015/16;
- to note the fees and charges to be applied to each event. It was agreed that a fee should not be applied to the Round the Borough Bike on 15 May 2016 or the Round the Borough Hike on 3 September 2016.
- that the Clerk be authorised to consider whether approval be granted to the Downs Young Athletes League event application, in consultation with the Chairman.

The Conservators requested the Downs Manager to inform the organisers of the Downs Cross County League that late applications would not be considered in the future. The Conservators also requested that the deadlines for event application submission be made clearer on the website for the Downs and on the application form.

19 MINUTES OF THE EPSOM AND WALTON DOWN CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The Conservators received and noted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee held on 29 September 2015. The following item was considered:

- Minute 2 b) ii, Reference to “must”. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Conservators that national guidance with regard to the control of dogs indicated that Byelaw 2 (2) (b) could be interpreted as a requirement to keep dogs on a lead. The Conservators expressed that the current drafting of Minute 2 b) ii did not relay this as a possibility, and requested the Democratic Services Officer to consider reviewing the wording of the Minute as a factual correction. It was suggested that the words “in his opinion” be added to the minute text, for it to read:

“The British Horse Society Representative expressed concern that the sign stated that dogs “must” be on leads prior to noon, but that in his opinion the current Downs Byelaws did not enable the Conservators to require dog walkers to do so. The Clerk informed the Committee that this would be reviewed prior to its consideration by the Conservators.” (amendment highlighted with underline)

20 DOWNS TOUR NOTES

The Conservators received and noted the Notes of the Downs Tour held on 21 September 2015. The following item was considered:

- Memorial benches on the Downs. The Conservators requested officers to present a report to a future meeting which would enable the current policy regarding memorial benches on the Downs to be reviewed. The current policy was to decline all such requests due to concerns that they would lead to a large number of similar requests, and additional maintenance responsibilities for the Downskeepers.

21 OUTSTANDING REFERENCES

The Conservators received and noted the position of their outstanding references to officers.

22 DATES OF MEETINGS IN 2016

The Conservators agreed the following dates for their meetings in 2016:

- Wednesday 20 January 2016 at 18.00 hours
- Wednesday 13 April 2016 at 18.00 hours
- Wednesday 15 June 2016 at 18.00 hours
- Wednesday 5 October 2016 at 18.00 hours

The meeting began at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.15 pm

COUNCILLOR LIZ FROST (CHAIRMAN)