

**Minutes of the Meeting of the EPSOM AND WALTON DOWNS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 14 October 2024**

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**PRESENT -**

Councillor Steven McCormick (Chair); Councillor Bernice Froud, Sarah Rayfield (British Horse Society) and Alex Stewart (Epsom Downs Riders Protection Society)

In Attendance: Richard Balsdon (College Ward Residents' Association), Caroline Baldock (Epsom Equestrian Conservation Team), Philippa Ingleby (Local Hack Rider), Margaret Hollins (Epsom Civic Society)

Absent: Simon Durrant (Epsom Downs Racecourse) and Nigel Whybrow (Training Grounds Management Board) Jane Clarke (Woodcote Epsom Residents' Society (WERS)), Bob Eberhard (Epsom and Ewell Cycle Action Group), Nick Lock (Epsom Civic Society) (Substituted by Margaret Hollins), Nick Harrison (Tattenham & Preston Residents' Association), Tom Sammes (Epsom Downs Racecourse) and James Vincenti (Epsom Downs Model Aircraft Club)

Officers present: Jackie King (Chief Executive), Samantha Whitehead (Interim Assistant Head of Service - Streetcare), Sarah Clift (Senior Countryside Officer) and Phoebe Batchelor (Democratic Services Officer)

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**1 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee held on **25 March 2024** were agreed as a true record and the Chair was authorised to sign them.

**2 TRAINING GROUNDS MANAGEMENT BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Training Ground Management Board.

**3 ACTION TRACKER**

The Committee received a report presenting an update on the Committee Action Tracker.

The following matters were discussed:

- a) **Condition of Hack Canter Ride.** The Streetcare Manager informed the Committee that a meeting had taken place with Alex Stewart and Nigel

Whybrow to look at the issue and come up with a solution. The solution agreed upon, is to move the Hack Ride over slightly, as the current one is beyond repair.

- b) **Noticeboards.** The Chair informed the Committee that there are copies of the information to be put on the noticeboards, for Members and Invited representatives to consider and feedback on following the meeting. Invited representatives raised two noticeboards that needed further attention. The Chair noted the comments. The Streetcare Manager noted the locations and confirmed they would look into it.
- c) **Spoil Heaps.** The Chair informed the Committee that the spoil heaps in the top car park have increased. The Chair explained that this is primarily due to materials arriving from Kempton and Langbourne to help update and refurbish some of the bottom gallop. The bottom gallop is due to be updated through October and some, if not all, of those materials will be used to do that work.
- d) **Oak Trees.** The Chair informed the Committee that the Epsom and Ewell Tree Advisory Board are happy to fund the trees, depending on the size. The Chair set out that the next steps will be to discuss with the Council's Tree Officer, and the Countryside Team, to progress this item along. The Chair raised that there is a suggestion that the trees are a mix of oak trees and disease resistant elms. The Chair committed to speak to the Business Improvement District to provide additional funding for the project.
- e) **Ice Cream Van.** The Streetcare Manager confirmed that the Ice Cream Van will move location, into the Downskeepers Car Park, starting from next season.
- f) **Sycamore Trees.** The Streetcare Manager confirmed they have looked into the threat posed by sycamores to horses and stated that the Council is not in the position to start removing sycamore trees, due to the ash dieback on the Downs. The Streetcare Manager invited Members and representatives to speak to her if they have any specific issues and agreed to work collaboratively to find a solution.
- g) **Fibre Sand Gallop.** The Chair informed the Committee that a meeting had taken place with the Streetcare Manager, Nigel Whybrow, and Alex Stewart. The solution agreed is for Nigel Whybrow to amend the gateway that crosses the fibre sand gallop, to make it more open and inviting for hack riders to get across. The Chair invited feedback from hack riders on whether this will help address the issue.
- h) **Rifle Butts Alley.** The Streetcare Manager informed the Committee that the vegetation dump has been cleared.
- i) **Resurfacing of Hack Canter.** The Chair informed the Committee, that they had visited the Hack Canter in question, and observed it was ok. The Chair invited Members and representatives to raise anything if they were

still experiencing issues. The Chair agreed to speak to Nigel Whybrow to look at the areas mentioned by invited representatives and focus on getting some improvements.

- j) **Toilets on the Downs.** The Chair mentioned that if money can be identified to deliver this project, then it will be brought back to the Committee. However, at present, there is no budget for it.
- k) **Hack Posts.** The Streetcare Manager informed the Committee that the Downskeepers are working on putting hack posts into the locations that have been communicated by the relevant Member.

Following discussion, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Note the status and update on actions listed in the Committee Action Tracker.**

#### 4 ISSUES RAISED BY THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Committee discussed matters raised by Members of the Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee.

The following matters were discussed:

- a) **Out of Control Dogs.** The Member from the British Horse Society informed the Committee that they had received a report of an incident involving an out-of-control dog attacking a horse. The Member highlighted how it is a growing problem since the pandemic, as more people own dogs that have not been trained properly. The Committee considered the issue and discussed methods for avoiding further incidents going forwards. There was consensus that a targeted communication campaign regarding dog walking behaviour and rules on the Downs should be rolled out to both inform and remind users of the Downs of current processes in place to avoid future incidents. Members and invited representatives acknowledged that there are lots of dog owners who are respectful and sensible around horses, and it is a small, persistent minority who are causing issues.
- b) **Dangerous Dog Act.** The Member from the British Horse Society highlighted that all breeds of dog fall under the dangerous dog act, if the dog causes somebody to feel at risk of injury. The Member raised that it is important for people to realise that all breeds of dogs can make someone feel at risk of being harmed, no matter their size.
- c) **Fines.** An invited representative asked if fines could be enforced against the owners of out-of-control dogs. The Chair stated that the enforcement and operation of fines is difficult, and a certain level of evidence and background work is needed for a fine to be successfully enforced.

- d) **Training.** The invited representative from the Epsom Equestrian Conservation Team raised that if there are dogs who need to be trained how to act around horses, and vice versa, they can be brought up to Wildwood and help can be provided. The Chair noted the suggestion. The Chair suggested that a communication piece be rolled out first, before further avenues and options are explored.
- e) **Damage to dogs.** A Member of the Committee suggested that the communication campaign is approached through the view of the dog owner, by highlighting that their dog could get seriously injured if it does initiate an altercation with a horse. The Member mentioned that this could potentially deter dog owners them or force them to take it the issue seriously by focusing their attention on to what is important to them.
- f) **Targeted Communication Campaign.** The Chair said resources from the BHS or TJC would be looked at to see if previous communication schemes could be used again, rather than starting from scratch. The Streetcare Manager stated that it should be an ongoing comms campaign to keep it fresh in people's minds, rather than a one off piece.
- g) **Nonsuch Park Scheme.** The Streetcare Manager informed the Committee about the pilot commercial dog walking licensing scheme which is being launched in Nonsuch Park in 2025. The Chair raised that there are some concerns that commercial dog walkers that usually go to Nonsuch Park will be displaced to the Downs, once the licensing scheme launches. The Streetcare Manager mentioned that Nonsuch JMC are looking to introduce a Dog Code of Conduct, which will apply to all dog walkers in the park, not just commercial ones. The Chair informed the Committee that a report will be going to Conservators to proactively discuss how they wish to proceed with this issue.
- h) **Act of Parliament.** An invited representative asked if a Dog Code of Conduct would contravene the Act of Parliament which governs the Downs. The Chair responded to explain that they couldn't imagine it would cause issues with the Act of Parliament, and that the Code of conduct will just be simple guidelines that need to be followed and reiterated to users of the Downs.
- i) **Byelaws.** The Streetcare Manager mentioned that the Byelaws set out that dogs must be kept under proper control, meaning people could be prosecuted under the byelaws but sufficient evidence would be needed to do so. The Streetcare Manager highlighted that if it is a repeat offender, it is something the Council would be prepared to take on, but the evidence would be needed to back it up.
- j) **Warren Wood Trees.** A Member of the Committee asked what mechanism is in place when someone needs trees looked at which are on land owned by TJC. The Member highlighted the need for a process which can be followed when a concern is raised. The Chair encouraged

the Member to approach the Council's Tree Officer first to determine where the responsibility lies with respect to the tree/s that is/are concerned. The Chair mentioned that the Epsom and Ewell Tree Advisory Board could also provide advice where needed. The Streetcare Manager agreed to go on a site visit to the trees mentioned, along with the Council's Tree Officer to get further advice for the Member who raised the issue

Following discussion, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Consider the matters raised by members of the Committee as set out in this report.**

## 5 ISSUES RAISED FOR CONSIDERATION BY INVITED REPRESENTATIVES

The Committee discussed the issues raised by representatives invited to attend the meeting.

The following matters were discussed:

- a) **Noticeboard Content.** The Chair acknowledged that this item had been discussed during Agenda item 2, the Committee Action Tracker.
- b) **Car Park Behaviour.** An invited representative informed the Committee about an incident in the car park they had experienced and that has been reported to the police. The Chair highlighted the importance of reporting incidents to the police, so the police can correlate and coordinate the data and provide an adequate response.
- c) **Vending on the Downs.** An invited representative raised concerns regarding the vending discussions that took place at the June Conservators Meeting and asked that no other vendors are encouraged to set up on the Downs. The Chair explained that the vending on the Downs scheme is a pilot scheme, which will be used to understand if there is any additional demand or need for more vending facilities on the Downs. The Streetcare Manager informed the Committee that there is a vendor who will begin a six-month trial, situated in the View-point Car Park. The Streetcare Manager explained that litter picking is covered under the scheme agreement, and the environmental impact has been considered by both the Council and the vendor.
- d) **Antiques Fair sign.** An invited representative raised that the sign should be moved. The Streetcare Manager confirmed that the sign will be removed.
- e) **Downskeepers' Responsibilities.** The Committee asked for clarity as to what the Downskeepers' are responsible for, specifically when it comes to grass verge cutting, and putting back posts that have been removed. The Streetcare Manager informed the Committee that Surrey County Council

are responsible for the verge cutting, and they may not have included the area discussed as part of their responsibility now. The Streetcare Manager informed the Committee that the verges would be sorted, and the location communicated to the Downskeepers'. The Streetcare Manager explained that there has been a few temporary Downskeepers' in place, covering staff absences, who might not have been as knowledgeable of the Downs. The Streetcare Manager committed to dealing with all of the points raised and encouraged people to raise issues with the Council's Contact Centre, in order for them to be documented and dealt with.

- f) **Grassland Management.** The Countryside Officer provided an update on the grassland management work of the Team. The Countryside Officer signposted the Committee to the Habitat Management Plan for the Downs, which can be found on the Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Website.
- g) **Grazing on Juniper Hill.** The Countryside Officer informed the Committee that the possibility of reintroducing grazing on the Downs, is being explored and investigated. The Countryside Officer explained that the next step will be a feasibility study to determine costs and logistics, before going out to public consultation.
- h) **Committee visit.** The Chair informed the Committee that an opportunity to go and do a tour of the Downs for Committee Members and invited representatives will be communicated soon.
- i) **Spoil Heaps.** An invited representative asked what will be done with the spoil heaps behind the Derby start. The Chair confirmed they would look into this and report back.
- j) **Potholes.** The Chair informed the Committee that potholes are the responsibility of Surrey Country Council and invited the Committee to raise pothole issues with SCC as and when they are aware of them.
- k) **Epsom Downs Horse Riders Facebook Group.** An invited representative informed the Committee that a Facebook Group has been set up for local horse riders. The group is currently made up for 240 members. The invited representative explained that events on the Downs will be publicised in the group, so horse riders are aware of what is taking place and when. The invited representative highlighted that the group can be used as a communication tool, to communicate to and from horse riders. The Committee asked that it is made clear and accessible which events on the Downs have been approved by Conservators and will be taking place. A Member suggested a live document is made publicly available so it can be updated as events are agreed throughout the year.
- l) **Race Horses using Hack Tracks.** The Chair noted comments made about race horses using hack tracks and confirmed they would speak to Nigel Whybrow and the issue will be addressed.

- m) **School Run Traffic.** An invited representative flagged an issue with speeding traffic on Chalk Lane and queried if the gate at the bottom of Chalk Lane could be locked. The Chair informed the Committee that Surrey Highways have looked into this and determined that the gate can be locked, but the logistics of how it will be managed is an issue that has not been sorted yet. The Chair committed to providing an update when there is more information to share. The Member from the BHS raised that the Traffic Regulation Order should be checked to see if it mentions all vehicular traffic or just motorised traffic. The Chair confirmed that they would check the TRO.
- n) **Additional lighting.** The Chair informed the Committee that they have asked SCC for additional lighting, to improve safety, to be put in place outside the Durdans. The Chair stated that if that can be achieved within their SCC Member allowance, it will be actioned.

Following discussion, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Consider the matters raised by invited representatives as set out in this report.**

## 6 ITEMS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE CONSERVATORS

The Chair informed the Committee that a Commercial Dog Walking Report would be taken to the November Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators Meeting.

The Committee did not identify any other items from the meeting which would require verbal representation to the Conservators.

*The meeting began at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.31 pm*

COUNCILLOR STEVEN MCCORMICK (CHAIR)