

Minutes of the Meeting of the EPSOM AND WALTON DOWNS CONSERVATORS held on 20 January 2016

PRESENT -

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

In Attendance:

Absent: Simon Dow (Horserace Betting Levy Board) and Councillor Jan Mason

Officers present: Kathryn Beldon (Director of Finance and Resources), Sam Beak (Downs Manager), Bob Harding (Head Downskeeper), Tim Richardson (Democratic Services Officer), Samantha Whitehead (Streetcare Manager) and Simon Young (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

23 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators held on 7 October 2015 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

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

The Conservators received a report providing an update on items considered by the Epsom and Walton Downs Training Grounds Management Board (TGMB). The following matters were considered:

- a) Hatched area at the foot of Walton Downs. The Conservators noted that the TGMB had considered that it had no reason to change its stance with regard to the Hatched Area, and had reconfirmed that it could not authorise the use of the Hatched Area for hack riding.
- b) Control of Dog walking. The Conservators were informed that a press release had been issued with regard to the control of dogs on the Downs, and that the issue had generated a significant amount of comment on Facebook. The Chairman and Nick Patton (Jockey Club Estates Training Ground Manager) had spoken on local radio regarding the need for dogs to be held on leads prior to noon daily.

Some media coverage had not recognised that the Downs was privately owned land, or that the restriction requiring dogs to be held on leads was only until noon daily. The Conservators noted that these key pieces of information would be reinforced through further communications.

The Head Downkeeper informed the Conservators that the Downkeepers were already informing Downs visitors of the requirement to hold dogs on leads and that a 'soft' approach was being taken to the matter. If repeat offences continued in the future, the possibility of taking action under the Byelaws remained open to the Conservators.

In response to a question, the Conservators were informed that the local trainers' code of conduct required riders using the Downs to wear fluorescent jackets. There was general adherence to this, and they also commonly used flashing lights, to increase their visibility to other Downs users.

- c) Extension of Polytrack. The TGMB intended to extend the Polytrack on Walton Downs to the full length for which it had been granted planning permission (an additional 1.5 furlongs). It hoped to undertake this work in March/April 2016.

25 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS AND OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

- a) Warning signs near traffic lights for the horse crossing in front of the Queens Stand. The Conservators were informed that the Training Grounds Management Board had approved a budget of £1,200 for the introduction of warning signs near the traffic lights.
- b) Access to the Tattenham Corner Road Crossing for pedestrians walking from Tattenham Corner Station. The Conservators considered comments on the pedestrian access in the area made by Surrey County Council Highways Service and noted that the location did not have a history of incidents or accidents. Following consideration, the Conservators did not identify any further action which they wished to pursue with regard to the crossing.
- c) Dog control on the Downs. Consideration of this matter was made under item 2 of the Agenda (Items of interest discussed by the Training Grounds Management Board (TGMB))
- d) Combined Habitat Management Plan for the Downs. The Conservators were informed that Peter Howarth, a Countryside Officer for the Borough Council had been commissioned to undertake a review of the Habitat Management Plan for Epsom Golf Club, and combine it with the Habitat Management Plan for the Downs. This would be undertaken later in the year once the weather had improved.

- e) Satisfaction of the Highways Authority to works to the surface of Walton Road. The Conservators noted that the Highways Authority representative had commented that it was satisfied with the works undertaken to the surface of Walton Road by the TGMB, and happy for the road hump to remain in place.
- f) The Queen's 90th Birthday Beacon. The Streetcare Manager informed the Conservators that an invitation to host a Beacon on 21 April 2016 had been received from the Pageant Master for the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations.

The Conservators were informed that if it were agreed to host a beacon for the event, a gas fuelled beacon would be utilised, rather than one made from wood. This would remove several of the difficulties encountered when planning for the Queen's Golden Jubilee beacon in 2012. It was noted that the logistical arrangements for such an event would be managed by the Council's Operational Services Division.

The Conservators expressed support for the event in principle, and requested that more detailed information be provided to the Conservators and Epsom and Walton Downs Consultative Committee for consideration prior to its approval by the Chairman and the Clerk to the Conservators.

26 REPORT OF THE HEAD DOWNSKEEPER

The Conservators received and noted the report of the Head Downskeeper, which detailed recent events and works on the Downs.

27 REVIEW OF FEES & CHARGES FOR EVENTS ON THE DOWNS

The Conservators received a report providing a review of the fees and charges for events on the Downs, and proposing amendments to the Fees and Charges Policy.

The Downs Manager informed the Conservators that the report did not propose an increase to the charges for events on the Downs, as the majority of events were held for charitable purposes, and if an increase was made, it would likely discourage the organisers from holding them at all.

Following consideration, the Conservators approved the changes to the Fees and Charges Policy, as detailed in section 2 and the Annexe to the report.

28 CHANGES TO THE PROCEDURE FOR ISSUING METAL DETECTING LICENCES ON EPSOM AND WALTON DOWNS

The Conservators received a report detailing a new procedure for the issue of metal detecting licenses on the Downs, and reviewing the charge for such licences.

The following matters were considered:

- Number of permits available. The Conservators were informed that all 20 permits for 2016 had been purchased within 2 hours of being made available, and that if further licenses had been available, these would have been purchased also. The Conservators considered the potential to increase the number of licenses from 20, and noted that whilst a large increase in the number of licenses would also increase concerns that the condition of the Downs could be damaged by inappropriate digging, a small increase would likely not create any problems. The Downskeepers monitored activity by people metal detecting on the Downs, and would be able to continue to do so if there was a small increase in the number of licences issued. The Conservators considered that an increase of 5 licences would be appropriate, but should be reviewed in October 2016 to consider any issues which had arisen as a result.
- Management of inappropriate digging. The Conservators considered that Metal Detectors using the Downs should be informed that if they dug in areas not permitted by their licence, their licence would be revoked. Officers were requested to review the wording of the licence to this effect.
- Price of Licences. The Conservators considered and supported the proposed increase in price of the Metal Detecting Licenses to £40 from January 2017.

The Conservators also discussed the potential for a future annual £5 increase in the cost of the Licence. Future increases in the price of the Metal Detecting Licence would be considered when the Licenses were next reviewed.

Following consideration, the Conservators:

- (1) Noted the changes to the procedure for issuing metal detecting licences as detailed in Annexe 1 to the report;
- (2) Agreed to increase the fee per Metal Detecting Licence to £40 for the 2017 calendar year;
- (3) Agreed to increase the maximum number of Metal Detecting Licences available to 25 with immediate effect, subject to a review of the number of licences being presented to the October 2016 meeting of the Conservators.
- (4) Requested Officers to review the wording of the Licenses, and amend it if necessary to make it clear that they would be revoked if the licence holder dug in non-permitted areas.

29 BUDGET 2016-17

The Conservators received a report seeking approval to the 2016/17 budget and to the amounts to be recovered from the constituent bodies.

Following consideration, the Conservators:

- (1) Agreed the budget for 2016/17 as set out in Annexe 1 to the report, with a request for a 4% increase in precept from the constituent bodies as follows:-

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council: £222,770

Epsom Downs Racecourse: £111,380

Epsom and Walton Downs Training Board: £37,130

30 EPSOM DOWNS RACING SEASON 2016

The Conservators received a report informing them of the dates for race meetings in 2016 and presenting a request from Epsom Downs Racecourse for extensions to the periods permitted for fencing.

Simon Durrant informed the meeting that an evening music event would be held at the Racecourse following the racing on 30 June 2016, and that details of the event would be publicised within the next two weeks.

The Conservators noted that the extensions requested were the same as those granted in 2015. Simon Durrant informed the meeting that the extensions were necessary as the preparation and dismantling periods permitted by the Epsom and Walton Regulation Act 1984 did not overlap in the current calendar year, as they did in some years. Simon Durrant also informed the Conservators that the fencing for the Lonsdale Enclosure would include an entrance and an exit at all times, to enable its use as a hack riding area under the Act.

The Conservators noted the information contained within sections 7 and 8 of the report (relating to previous decisions and legal clarification), and following consideration:

- (1) Noted the dates of the 2016 racing season for Epsom Downs;
- (2) Granted consent under the Byelaws for the Downs for the start of the fencing period for the Upper Tattenham Enclosure and Lonsdale Enclosure to be brought forward to 16 May 2016, an extension of 4 days;
- (3) Granted consent under the Byelaws for the Downs to the extension of the fencing period for the Lonsdale Enclosure to 15 June 2016, an extension of 1 day;
- (4) Granted consent under the Byelaws for the Downs to the extension of the fencing period for the Lonsdale Enclosure to enable fencing to remain in place between the dates of 8 -14 August 2016, an extension of 7 days.

31 HACK SAND TRACK, FOOT OF WALTON DOWNS

The Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services apologised that it had not been possible to provide a report regarding this matter to this meeting of the Conservators. A full written report would be presented to the next meeting, on 13 April 2016.

32 EPSOM GOLF CLUB UNAUTHORISED DEVELOPMENT

The Council's Head of Legal and Democratic Services apologised that it had not been possible to provide a report regarding this matter to this meeting of the Conservators. A full written report would be presented to the next meeting, on 13 April 2016.

33 OUTSTANDING REFERENCES

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

The meeting began at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.55 pm

COUNCILLOR LIZ FROST (CHAIRMAN)