

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE
HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2017 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.35 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Laura Blumenthal, Kay Gilder, Mary Holmes and Alison Swaddle

Friends of Highwood

Freda Pattison (Community Representative)

Officers Present

Simon Bartlam (Countryside Operations Officer) and Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Kay Gilder was elected as Chairman of the Conference for 2017/18.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Beth Rowland.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Conference meeting held on 19 January 2017 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of thanks to the Friends of Highwood for their efforts during the year (Minute 7).

5. COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE RANGERS' REVIEW

Simon Bartlam, Countryside Operations Officer, introduced the Countryside Service report, set out on Page 9 of the Agenda. The report gave details of the activities carried out during the year in accordance with the Highwood Management Plan. The report included details of the following:

- Management Tasks – establishment of 700m of surfaced paths, installation of four welcome signs, heathland regeneration and fencing.
- General Ranging – cutting back vegetation, removing fly tipping and sections of barb wire, litter picking, addressing illegal footpath, fires, etc.
- Volunteer Involvement – working with the Friends of Highwood, 58 volunteer workdays and four days of Himalayan balsam pulling from the Heathland.
- Winter Programme 2017/18 – rhododendron/laurel control, scrub management, closure of illegal access point and installation of official access point (including signboard).

Simon also informed the Conference that the Bulmershe Pond would be handed over to Wokingham Borough Council on 31 March 2018. Work was under way to bring the pond site into a reasonable state before it was handed over to WBC to manage.

Simon confirmed that S106 funding of £21k still remained out of the original allocation. This would be used to fund the work programme going forwards.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- Muddy condition of certain paths within Highwood;
- Behaviour of cyclists using paths and causing problems for walkers;
- Creation of an Illegal footpath from the Cala Homes Development;
- Cala Homes not meeting their obligations relating to access points;
- Residents at High Tree Drive installing a gate into their fence to allow access;
- Two sexual assaults had taken place in the woods during 2017;
- No progress on the Highwood web pages due to the secondment of a key member of staff.
- Encouraging wildlife diversity on the site, e.g. hedgehog hotels.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Countryside Service report be noted;
- 2) the Countryside Service team be thanked for their hard work and commitment relating to Highwood;
- 3) Simon Bartlam investigate measures to control the activities of cyclists on the site;
- 4) Simon Bartlam be notified of any criminal activity or anti-social behaviour on the Highwood site;
- 5) The proposed action to remove the illegal gate access and footpath be supported;
- 6) Simon Bartlam coordinate a press release on the positive messages from the Conference and the issues relating to cyclists' behaviour;
- 7) Laura Blumenthal and Simon Bartlam coordinate contacts at Cala Homes.

6. REPORT FROM THE FRIENDS OF HIGHWOOD

Freda Pattison confirmed that the issues from the Friends of Highwood group had been raised during the earlier discussion on the Countryside Service report.

RESOLVED That the report from the Friends of Highwood be noted.