

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE  
HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2017 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.35 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Laura Blumenthal, Beth Rowland, Kay Gilder, Guy Grandison, Mary Holmes and Alison Swaddle

**Friends of Highwood**

Freda Pattison (Community Representative)

**Officers Present**

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

**1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Kay Gilder was elected Chairman of the Conference for the 2016/17 municipal year.

**2. APOLOGIES**

No apologies were submitted.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Simon Bartlam updated the Conference on the S106 funds available for improvement works at the Highwood site. The current amount available was £52k.

Simon Bartlam also updated the Conference on the development of web pages giving details of the Highwood site. Work had begun to develop the web pages as part of the wider Countryside Services section of the Council's website. The relevant officer had been seconded to work on the Council's major organisational change programme and it was likely, therefore, that the work on the web pages would be progressed later in the year.

**5. COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE REPORT**

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

- Management Tasks – removal of dangerous trees and scrub on the heathland;
- General Rangering – cutting back footpaths, removing flytipping, litter picking, site inspections and managing incidents;
- Volunteer Involvement – support from the Friends Group and volunteer workdays including the Dinton work skills project.

Simon reported that ongoing action related to rhododendron/laurel control and completion of heathland fencing. It was also proposed to carry out a test project to remove scrub from a designated section of the heathland area. This project would be well signposted to inform residents about the work.

Simon also reported on the involvement of volunteers in the improvement works. The number of volunteers had reduced in the past year, partly due to the reduction in community service activities. However, as a result of the additional countryside sites coming on stream across the Borough, additional staff resources were being allocated to the Countryside Service. This would help to create additional capacity which would benefit sites such as Highwood.

The Conference provided feedback on specific issues raised by local Members and residents, including:

- Ownership of the Bulmershe pond;
- Access issues relating to the Reading Borough Council allotments adjacent to Highwood;
- Exposed barbed wire along the boundary with the allotments;
- Opportunities for voluntary work for young people identified by the neighbourhood policing team;
- The potential for introducing hedgehog hotels at the Highwood site.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the Countryside Service report be noted;
- 2) the Countryside Service team investigate the issues raised by Members and local residents.

## **6. HIGHWOOD PROGRAMME OF WORKS**

The Conference considered a report, Agenda pages 11 to 13, which gave details of the proposed Highwood programme of works. Simon Bartlam introduced the report and highlighted the following issues for consideration by the Conference:

- Fencing around the heathland was completed in August 2016 at a cost of £4,650 – this included four access points through the heath and 450m of netting around its perimeter.
- Quotations had been received for two styles of signboard – shot blasted cedar boards and Oak ladder boards. The Conference was asked to express a preference for the new signboards. The signs would indicate that the site was managed by the Countryside Service with contact details and space for notices/site information. The Conference supported the Oak ladder signboards at a cost of £2,600 for five boards.
- A quotation had been received for 500m of footpath improvements on the site. The map included in the agenda highlighted 400m of proposed improvements. It was

proposed that the remaining 100m of works be earmarked for a link to the new housing development adjacent to the site. The Conference supported the footpath improvements highlighted in the report and proposed improvements to a further 70m length of footpath adjacent to the allotments boundary.

Funding of the works highlighted in the report would leave £22k in the budget which could be carried forward and potentially used to respond to additional pressures arising out of the new housing development adjacent to the Highwood site. Simon Bartlam reported that confirmation was still awaited on the issue of access to the new housing development.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the Oak ladder signboards, detailed in the report, be approved;
- 3) the proposed footpath improvements be approved;
- 4) the funding proposals in the report be approved;
- 5) Simon Bartlam provide information to members of the Conference on the annual maintenance expenditure for the Highwood site.

**7. REPORT FROM THE FRIENDS OF HIGHWOOD**

The Conference received a verbal report from Freda Pattison on behalf of the Friends of Highwood Group. Freda reported that there were no ongoing issues relating to the site.

The Conference discussed access issues relating to the various site entrances and gates.

Simon Bartlam confirmed that the levels of littering and flytipping at the site were similar to previous years.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) the report from the Friends of Highwood be noted;
- 2) the Countryside Services team consider any accessibility issues relating to the Highwood site.

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