

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE
HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Laura Blumenthal, David Hare, Kay Gilder, Mary Holmes, Geoff Littler and Alistair Neal

Friends of Highwood

Freda Pattison (Community Representative)

Officers Present

Simon Bartlam (Countryside Service) and Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Kay Gilder was elected as Chairman for the 2019/20 Conference.

2. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Conference held on 8 January 2019 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE RANGER'S REVIEW

Simon Bartlam, Countryside Operations Officer, gave an update on progress at Highwood since the conference in January 2019.

Simon began by updating the Conference on the actions set out in the Minutes from the previous Conference, as follows:

- Bulmershe Pond Transfer – there had been no progress during the year, but Simon was continuing to monitor the situation. It was suggested that Members continue to use contacts at the University to chase progress.
- Cyclists – Simon reported that there had been few issues with cyclists and no complaints had been made. The site included signs with contact details in case of any incidents.
- Encroachment – there had been no issues relating to encroachment during the year.
- Access Improvements – Simon reported that the residual £18k funding would be used over the next few months to continue improvements and repairs to paths around the site. The Countryside Service had budgets which could be used for further works when the £18k was used up. There was a gas pipeline running through part of the site and a meeting was being arranged with the pipeline owners to clarify any works being undertaken in the vicinity.

- Ditch Blockages – Simon reported that the ditch leading to Earley Station had been cleared of leaves and debris.
- Highwood Web Pages – there had been no progress over the past year. Simon reported that a new staff member would be able to assist in developing web pages over the next six months. It was also suggested that contact be made with local schools, e.g. Bulmershe, about potential involvement. Simon confirmed that there was a definitive map of the site which could be shared with Members.

Simon went on to introduce the Countryside Service Rangers' Review for 2019/20. Simon highlighted the following points:

- Scrub Removal from the Heathland Compartment – this could involve removing a significant amount of topsoil (up to 300 tons) from the site. Simon was investigating funding options for this work, e.g. Defra grants and Thames Water funding. It was suggested that a site visit be arranged during the summer to brief Members on the ongoing works.
- Rhododendron removal from Compartment 4.
- Reed bed establishment on Southlake – works being undertaken by the angling club and the Countryside service.
- Network Rail Scheme – funding for woodland improvement works in the Reading area, including works at Highwood.
- General work including cutting back footpaths, strimming and removing hung up trees. Once again, volunteer involvement was much appreciated with 105 volunteer workdays (excluding Friends visits) during the year.
- Removal of five incidents of fly tipping and dumping of garden waste.
- Responded to four incidents of illegal camping and removal of one individual from the site.
- New Dog Bin – it was reported that a new dog bin had been requested adjacent to the entrance from the Cala Homes site. Simon agreed to chase progress on this.
- Upcoming works over the next few months included coppicing in Compartment 4 and Rododendron/Laurel control in Compartments 1-4. This was in addition to the path surfacing works.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Rangers' Review report be noted;
- 2) Simon Bartlam and the Countryside Service team be thanked for their hard work and support during 2019;
- 3) Laura Blumenthal contact Alison Swaddle about engagement with the University re Bulmershe Pond;

- 4) David Hare make use of contacts at the University on the pond issue, as necessary;
- 5) A copy of the Highwood definitive map be circulated to members of the conference;
- 6) A site visit be arranged for the summer of 2020 to provide Members with an update on site issues;
- 7) Simon Bartlam chase progress on the proposed new dog bin adjacent to the Cala Homes site entrance;
- 8) Development of Highwood web pages be pursued during 2020, including contact with local schools;
- 9) The proposed improvement works over the next few months be supported.

6. REPORT FROM THE FRIENDS OF HIGHWOOD

Simon Bartlam reported that the Friends Group had continued to support the Countryside Service by walking the site every day, litter picking, reporting problems and directing Countryside Service staff to the location of jobs on the site.

Freda Pattison confirmed that Friends' issues had been addressed during the earlier discussions.

RESOLVED: That the Friends of Highwood be thanked for their ongoing commitment and support to the Countryside Service.

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