

DRAFT

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 3 DECEMBER 2014 FROM 7.30PM TO 8.10PM

Present:

Wokingham Borough Council - *Kay Gilder, Shahid Younis*

Earley Town Council – *Guy Grandison*

Woodley Town Council – *Mary Holmes and Linda Higgs*

Friends of Highwood – *Freda Pattison*

Also present:-

Simon Bartlam, Countryside Officer Operations, WBC Countryside Service

Tricia Harcourt, Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. ELECTION OF A CHAIRMAN

Kay Gilder was elected Chairman of the Conference for the 2014/15 municipal year.

2. NOTES

The Conference received the notes of the meeting held on 28 November 2013.

3. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Jenny Lissaman, Earley Town Council

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE REPORTS

Simon Bartlam introduced his report as set out on Agenda page 4, which gave details of work carried out during the year in accordance with the Management Plan.

Management Tasks

- Removal of a number of fallen trees across footpaths, staff and contractors 3 days.
- Scrub removal on heathland, staff and volunteers 14 days.
- Removal of dangerous trees, staff and volunteers 1 day.
- Rhododendron control compartment 1-4, has been started, but not completed

General Rangering

- General work including cutting back footpaths, strimming and removing hung-up trees.
- Removing flytipping, garden waste, dumped wood and a sofa.
- Litter picking.
- Boundary/ site inspection, fixing stiles.

Volunteer involvement

- The Friends group has continued to support The Countryside Service, by walking every day helping to patrol the site, litter picking, reporting of problems and directing us on site to location of jobs.
- 250 volunteer workdays (excluding Friends visits) have been carried out this year; including those from Pinnacle - a back to work programme, Community Services.

Next year (this winter)

- Rhododendron/ Laurel control in compartments 1-4

Simon reported that although last year he had lost the valued input of the prisoners, which was badly affecting the amount of work that could be done on site, he now had people from the Pinnacle back to work programme. This is a scheme set up to help long term unemployed people gain skills and help out with community projects. Up to 35 people are working on the parks for 1 to 6 months at a time carrying out projects such as litter picking, cutting back of vegetation on paths and general maintenance. They are very useful with basic maintenance, but can be used to help with bigger projects like ditch clearing if necessary.

Also because the improved facilities at Dinton Pastures have been so successful and have taken up a lot of staff time, two additional estate workers have been taken on within the Countryside Service. This means that there is the opportunity to have 3 or 4 workers on site during major projects. The knock on effect is that it is hoped to be able to provide an improved service at Highwood, such as emptying the rubbish bins more often.

In relation to the proposed housing developments on the University of Reading Bulmershe Campus site which adjoins Highwood, Simon said he was not aware of any of the approved S106 contribution of £48,808 for '*enhancements and improvements within Highwood*' being received by the Countryside Service. Tricia Harcourt pointed out that according to Legal Agreement attached to the planning permission, the S106 money had to be paid by the new developer "...on or before the occupation of any dwelling within the development..."

Kay said that in pre-application discussions with the new developer she had stressed the importance of the boundary fencing being provided, and that there should be limited access points into Highwood. There is only one access point from the new development on the plans, but although it had been suggested that the fence needed to be 2m high that was not possible. However a ranch type fence with a wide hedge of prickly planting is being provided. Also, the arrangement of the houses is such that there are no back gardens at the boundary – the front of the houses overlook the Wood. It was agreed that the creation of unofficial accesses breaching the boundary fence/hedging should be prevented. Simon indicated that they would monitor the boundary.

Simon said that there are reports from a local resident that the litter bin near the entrance gets full and that it seems to be used by a few people for their domestic rubbish. This bin gets emptied on Monday and Friday. The level of fly-tipping is about the same as before. There had been an incident where a quad bike was being used but it was swiftly reported and the police had become involved. Several complaints had been made but they were about issues in the allotments.

Kay mentioned that one regular user of the Wood has been clearing the ditch near the bridle path. He is very enthusiastic about working in the Wood but people are worried

about what would happen if he had an accident when he was on his own – he is not always in the best of health. Simon said that now he is able to be on site more often he will speak to him and try to guide him to join in with organised work parties.

Kay and Freda mentioned that the main path was very muddy in places, particularly near the University; people are walking around trees to avoid the mud, which is making the paths wider. Simon said he would look at it and the solution could be to put stone chippings down with wood chippings on top.

6. REPORT FROM THE FRIENDS OF HIGHWOOD

Freda Pattison, Chairman of the Friends Group commented that that the Friends had continued with daily litter picking, and at the moment there seems to be less. They also report of blockages or damage to paths or any other problems. The issue of muddy paths had already been discussed.

Simon thanked the Friends for the contribution they make to the upkeep and protection of the Wood.

These are the Minutes of a meeting of the Highwood Management Conference

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