

MINUTES OF MEETING NO. 3 OF THE NOMANSLAND JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

held in the Hewitt Room, The Memorial Hall, Marford Road, Wheathampstead on Thursday 7 April 2011 at 7.30pm.

Present:

Councillors: G. Churchard (Chairman), A. Brewster (Vice Chairman), J. Churchard, P. Kennedy, J. Newton-Davies, N. Page, J. Turner

Officers in Attendance:

Judith Adamson – Regulatory Solicitor – St. Albans City & District Council
Nick Sherriff – Parks and Green Spaces Officer
Jon Green – Parks and Green Spaces Manager
Richard Sweetland – Countryside Ranger

Members of the Public - 9

Administrator

Mrs. I. Casper - Deputy Clerk Wheathampstead Parish Council

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** – Cllr. Gill Clark
2. **REPLACEMENT MEMBERS** – Cllr. J. Turner
3. **DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST** - Cllr. Newton-Davies is a member of the Woodland Trust.
4. **NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON 13 JANUARY 2011**
The notes of meeting No. 2 held on 13 January 2011 had been circulated. Cllr. Page requested that the briefing notes that had been circulated at the meeting on 13 January 2011 were attached to the minutes. Agreed
The minutes were then confirmed and signed by the Chairman.
5. **BRIEFING NOTE – NOMANSLAND COMMON JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Cllr Page has provided detailed briefing notes on the Scheme of Management of Nomansland Common which had been circulated prior to the meeting. (Attached to minutes).

Judith Adamson had circulated a briefing note at the beginning of the meeting (attached to minutes) and went through the main items of concern that Cllr. Page had brought up.

- The Scheme of Management

The Common is managed in accordance with the Scheme of Management made under the Commons Act 1899, in 1953 by St. Albans City and District Council

- The role of the Council
The District Council (and its predecessors) sought to administer and manage the Common by establishing a joint Committee to carry out these functions
- The role of the Joint Committee
The Council can choose how they will operate a committee and its meetings through “standing orders:
- Co-opted membership
In the Act the Council retains responsibility for approving any co-opted members who must be non-voting.
- The role of ownership
Common land is land often owned by a private individual or by bodies such as the Church Commissioners. Any person or organisation, owning common land, do so subject to the rights of commoners and statutory provisions. The right of ownership over Nomansland Common is therefore restricted by the Scheme of Management made under this Commons Act 1899. Ownership effectively ranks below the Scheme of Management and owners cannot over ride the scheme.

A copy of Procedure for Nomansland Joint Committee (SADC) was given to the Administrator for information.

Members gave considerable consideration to this item and discussed points from both briefing notes. It was agreed that the relationship between committee members and officers is improving and good relations between parties are the key to moving forward on this matter. There has been much discussion on all points regarding the Scheme of Management and members felt that the advice received from Judith is reasonable. Argument could go on taking up time during more meetings without any different outcome. It was felt that the committee and officers getting should be getting on with the job of managing the Common.

Cllr. Brewster proposed that one way forward would be to ask if Wheathampstead Parish Council wants their solicitors to look into this matter.

DECISION

The Committee and Officers manage the Common under the present Scheme of Management.

RESOLVED

1. To thank Judith Adamson for all her hard work on this matter.
2. Wheathampstead Parish Council to be asked if it wants its solicitor to look into this item.
3. Nomansland Common to remain under the present Scheme of Management.

6. PROGRESS REPORT

Nick Sheriff Parks and Green Spaces Officer reported on works emerging from the Management Plan.

- (i) In addition to the ride management and thinning works, 2 silver birch trees were felled following a request by the model aircraft flying club and 8 dead elms were also felled on the old desire line footpath at the western end of the Common, following a request by Cllr. Page.

Cllr. Page expressed concern about the ride management thinning, which on the Annual Walk was described as 'ride management' and appears to be a major bridleway scheme involving major tree work. This is not universally popular piece of work and members of the public have been dismayed by the amount of tree work and clearance undertaken.

Information signs were installed a month before the work and the committee were consulted on the works through the report at the 13th January section 5.2.

Nick explained that work was done to the specification of the Forestry Commission who had provided grant funding for the project. He will pass details of the work to Cllr. Page.

Members pointed out that when details of works are not put before the committee it causes problems when committee members are quizzed about items by members of the public and they are in the dark themselves.

Members agreed that the Management Plan should be looked at again. The next 5 year phase is due to be started so it is a good time to be reviewed by members and Officers.

- (ii) A section of hedge has been flailed along the southern boundary to reduce the spread of blackthorn scrub. The scrub along the B651 has also been cut back to improve sight lines when crossing the main road.

- (iii) Interpretation
The interpretation boards have now been installed at various points around the common. The leaflet has been distributed to libraries, pubs and council offices around the District and is available to download from SADC, WPC, SPC and CMS websites.

- (iv) Access Improvements on the Common
Access improvements have now been refurbished / installed along Ferrers Lane / Down Green Lane and across the B651 to the start of the Bridleway.

Cllr. Newton-Davies asked about the installation of signs to show where horses cross. Nick has spoken to an officer from HCC this week and will circulate designs by email to all committee members for consideration. The choice to include; Quiet Lane / Slow Down Horses Crossing.

Most of the signs will be placed on existing posts.

The access improvements have included brick red granite chippings at entrances which some members expressed concern about. Nick explained that the colour identifies the entrance points but said that the next time, the entrances need topping up a more subdued colour chippings will be used.

(v) Access Point

An earth ramp has been constructed down to the boardwalk and a complaint has been received that it is not wide enough. Nick has visited the site; the ramp has not been constructed by SADC he will check with HCC if it is their work.

Cllr. Newton-Davies asked for a progress report on the steps on FP32.

Nick informed that the Woodland Trust intend to put a ramp at the west end, he will contact Louise Nicho for an update and pass the information on to committee members.

(vi) Cricket Club Works

Wheathampstead cricket Club has almost completed their refurbishment of the net facilities.

ACTION

1. Nick Sherriff – Details of thinning works to be forwarded to Cllr. Page.
2. Nick Sherriff to circulate details of Highways signs to member
3. Nick Sherriff to ask HCC if they are responsible for the earth ramp at the boardwalk.
4. Nick Sherriff – to contact the Woodland Trust for an update on the ramp on FP32.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report
2. Management Plan to be on the agenda for the next committee meeting

7. RANGER'S REPORT

Richard Sweetland gave a verbal report.

- Pest control and litter picking ongoing.
- The southern boundary is to be litter picked.
- There is a lot of litter in the ditches by the side of the road. It is a mammoth task removing it, and dangerous.
- A load of old car tyres were dumped on Ferrers Lane and by the Cricket Pavilion. Richard had them removed by the contractor.
- Two elderly gas cylinders had been dumped. Removed by Richard.
- Two mini motorcyclists have been driving round the front of the Cricket Pavilion and onto the Common. Richard had spoken to the lads, but they were back within 2 hours. The police have been alerted.
- The birch trees near the flying area are going to have hawthorn saplings removed.

Mr. Cornell – Litterblitz - asked why there are no litter bins on the Common. Richard informed everyone that there used to be bins on the common some were set on fire others vandalised. This committee had then made the decision to have the bins removed to encourage people to take their litter home.

Mr. Cornell informed that members of Litterblitz do go down to the Common and litter hadn't been cleared from the embankment.

Richard does walk the embankment to litter pick but it is a very dangerous exercise because of passing vehicles.

Nick has spoken to Client Services re the B651 and clearing the embankments. They have vehicles and the correct equipment to litter pick along the fast road. The ditch is classed as highway and is also filled with fly tipping. The contractor will remove the tipping and litter. The contractors do litter pick when they are emptying the dog waste bins.

Cllr. Brewster proposed that the Committee thanked the Litterblitzers for all their hard work on clearing the Common. Agreed.

Cllr. Brewster informed members that Wheathampstead Parish Council have won a Lottery Grant for a Village Heritage Trail and Wheathampstead and Nomansland will be a major part of it.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.
2. Litterblitzers to be thanked for helping clear the Common. Action Administrator.

8. **COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

At the last committee meeting members had requested from SADC that the number of committee meetings be increased from 3 to 4 a year.

The District Council had responded:

We have to carefully balance the management requirements of the Common with the staff resources that are available. At present we feel that this balance is achieved with the existing arrangements. If any important decisions need to be made outside the existing meeting framework, Officers will consult with the Chair/Vice-Chair, or if time allows, the Committee members via email and/or letter.

Due to the Spring and autumn meeting dates, it may not be possible to hold a site visit before meetings due to the restricted daylight hours. However it may be possible to undertake this if the site visits were held earlier than the existing 6.30pm start.

Consideration was given to the response from SADC. Members would be happy to have an extra meeting with just one officer present and the overall view was that four meetings a year is not excessive.

Cllr. Newton-Davies proposed that there are four meetings of this committee a year spring/autumn/summer/winter including 2 site visits, seconded Cllr. Kennedy. So Resolved.

RESOLVED

The Nomansland Joint Management Committee meets four times a year, including 2 site visits. Nick Sherriff will have to refer this to senior management again.

9. **NOMANSLAND COMMON BUDGET**

Members of the Committee had requested that they were informed of the committee budget. Members never approve expenditure and are unaware of the income / expenditure of the committee.

SADC had responded:

Responsibility for the Nomansland Common budget rests with the District Council and the Committee has no direct responsibilities in this regard. However, as part of the Management Plan process the Committee are consulted on the main works that are funded from the budgets for the Common. The budget for the Common is also a public document that can be found on the District Council's web site.

It should also be noted that some works on the Common are conducted with the use of external funding, and they usually have specific work guidelines and objectives that need to be met to be able to receive the funding.

Consideration was given to this response. Officers said that as the Management Plan for the next 5 years was going to be looked at in detail at the next meeting costings - quotations could be included in the review.

RESOLVED

When the Management Plan is reviewed and costings/quotations are included for information.

10. **ITEMS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

Cllr. Brewster announced that that the Lottery bid for a Wildlife Project – Nomansland Nature Quest has been successful. This project is a joint venture between Wheathampstead Parish Council, Sandridge Parish Council and the Woodland Trust.

Mr. Culver – Flying Club

Mr. Culver reported that the three month trial period for flying 3 aircraft at any one time had passed without incident.

The trial had been publicised in the Wheathampstead Pump and the Neighbourhood News (Sandridge).

Members agreed that as only one complaint has been received and a legal ruling will have to be taken on whether or not this change becomes permanent the trial can be extended for another three months to 7 July 2011.

RESOLVED

The trial period to fly 3 aircraft at any one time is extended for another three months to July 7. The committee will have received legal advice on this matter by the July meeting.

11. **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

Annual Inspection – Thursday 7 July at 6pm to be followed by a committee meeting at 7.30pm in the cricket club Pavilion.

The meeting ended at 9.20pm.

(signed)

CHAIRMAN