

HENFIELD COMMONS JOINT COMMITTEE 07.12.2023

Minutes of a meeting of the **Henfield Commons Joint Committee** held at 9.30am in the Committee room of Henfield Hall

Meeting opened with welcome from Gill Perry to attendees.

Voting Members (HDC and HPC) Gill Perry (GP) Andrea May (AM) Josh Potts (JP)
Roger Noel (RN) Mike Morgan (MM)

Committee Members Dick Nye (DN) Eddie Colgate (EG) Pete Crawford (PC) Julie Coultas (JC)
Tony Baker (TB) John Willis (JW) Malin Andersson (MA)

- 1) **Declaration of Members Interests** - None
- 2) **Apologies** – Malcolm Eastwood (Chairman) Carol Eastwood (secretary) Jake Everitt (JE)
- 3) **Approval of minutes of 4 October 2023** – Minutes were agreed by members.
- 4) **Chairman’s Announcements**
 - a) Henfield Year of Biodiversity 2024:
 - Activities planned for the Tanyard in conjunction with Garden & Arts event.
 - More activities on Henfield Common including a bug hunt.
 - Management of scrub on the southern side of Oreham Common with the aim of improving habitat for Nightingale.
- 5) **Matters Arising**
 - a) **Governance**
 - Update from PC who explained that the constitution is currently being reviewed by the new Council administration and is now with HDC main legal office. Now is our opportunity to make amendments and changes.
 - Currently HCJC is a formal committee under the constitution of the Council. HDC Councilors nominated to attend, and the committee’s purpose is to manage Henfield Common, Broadmere Common, Oreham Common and the Tanyard. Representatives from Henfield Parish Council, Woodmancote Parish Council and HDC to attend. Land owned by HDC.
 - The proposal is to make management of the Commons an operational function of HDC. No formal committee required, but the committee would remain as a steering group or ‘Friends of’ group with agreed purpose and terms of reference.
 - GP suggested a process is needed to consider this. A meeting will be arranged for January 2024.

ACTION PC to liaise with HDC legal team and portfolio holder and arrange a meeting for Jan 2024.

- MM explained that there used to be a paid Clerk who would administer works in the past, but no longer in place. He is of the view that HDC officers could be a help.
- RN said he has had talks with the new Head of Service and HDC feels there should be a change. He agrees that managing all the Commons is too much for the Committee to on its own. One suggestion is that the Committee continue to manage Henfield Common and the Tanyard, whilst Oreham and Broadmere Commons could be HDC run. There is a reluctance to give it all up, but the right balance needs to be worked out. He also pointed out that there is not currently a volunteer for leader of the committee.
- AM asked for clarification on the process of the removal of a formal committee. PC explained the committee can continue to operate as it does now, but the change would be that it could cease to be a formal committee of the constitution of the Council. Instead, it could become a steering group/'friends of' group which holds HDC to account and provides the local feel and knowledge required for management decisions. This is a model which is successful elsewhere e.g. Warnham Local Nature Reserve has a Friends of group meeting regularly with HDC and have a service level agreement with details of who is responsible for what. If management becomes an operational function of the Council, it will also be scrutinised internally by a committee called the policy development group. Management plans, for example, would be taken to this group.
- RN said that now there is a sympathetic portfolio holder of Environment and Climate that is aligned with what the HCJC aims for the Commons.
- PC explained that with the Environment Act and Nature Recovery Network, the direction of travel is towards more environmental scrutiny. The duty of HDC under the Act is not just to protect, but also to enhance biodiversity.
- The Wilder Horsham project is embedded and is likely to receive additional funding to continue.
- MM asked about whether the committee could become a Policy and Development Group – a way of scrutinizing Council activity, but RN felt this was a step too far to bring under the control of Horsham.
- EC explained how he feels about the history of Henfield Common and said that local feel and view must be recognised and take priority even if they are looked after by HDC. He feels Henfield Common, the Tanyard and Broadmere Common feel part of Henfield. Oreham Common less so. GP said that a steering group could make sure local views are heard and considered.
- MM suggested Oreham Common management could be more HDC officer led. RN agreed that there are not enough resources and knowledge to manage all Commons successfully by the committee.
- JP suggested governance will be discussed in meeting in Jan 2024. Any decision will also need approval from HPC.

- TB said that HCV will need involvement and communication with HDC officers. There were questions around how much time HDC officers would dedicate to Henfield and around finance.
- JW said it would be important for him and the HCV to be involved as a group in the decision-making, not just being told what to do. He feels Henfield Common, Tanyard and Broadmere Common are important to him.
- DN said himself and the CPT can help with tree and scrub clearance, especially in the winter. Programme of work needed, and communication is key.
- JC thanked DN for all the work they have been doing to Henfield Common. She also felt it is particularly important to her to have continued involvement in the management of Henfield Common.
- GP said general steer is that that Henfield Common, the Tanyard and possibly Broadmere Common is kept as formal committee. RN said the proposal is not to give up all control of the Commons, but to allow HDC officers to help more with the 'heavy work' on the Commons.

b) Parking for Alma Terrace residents.

- PC as spoken to legal/parking colleagues. He said drop down barriers would not be suitable as we would in effect give away some of the Common to the person we give control of the parking space to. A parking permit scheme is possible, but would it make a difference without enforcement in the evening? It would also take a long time to get set up.
- GP reported she has seen a car parked in the evening on the A281 grass verge.
- RN suggested bollards on the grass verge. All agreed the situation with grass verge parking should be monitored before a decision is made, as may not be a regular occurrence.
- GP said the sign is confusing, as it refers to permit parking scheme, which is no longer in place. Mistake made by estate agent and resident not happy.

ACTION: DN to remove old parking sign.

- c) Fixed point photography – GP to share Mike A's contact details with MA so that this can progress.

6) **Open Forum** - Nothing raised

7) **Tanyard**

- i) Replacing dog bin liner.

Action HPC are dealing with this, as not an HDC bin.

- ii. Recent site meeting with MM, JP, NM, and MA.

- NM has arranged for works to be done to a Red Oak tree there.

- More management required to retain and improve wet grassland, especially scrub clearance. No management has been arranged by the committee and Peter Booth from PHB has retired.
- TB raised concerns about the extent of scrub clearance carried out by Dick and CPT in the past. Scrub clearance should be done rotationally and scrubby edges around the wet meadow should be retained.
- HCV have carried out some management in the Tanyard, especially around the pond.
- HDC asked to support, and MA said grazing the site would be the best option, but the site would need new stock fencing. JC said 3m bridleway must be retained. Post and rail is preferred if the budget will stretch to that.
- Grazing a problem in the past when Sam Buckland had sheep there, DEFRA stopped due to land being contaminated. MA to try find out more from Sam Buckland.
- A bioblitz of the Tanyard during the Garden & Arts event on 8 June 2024 was agreed

ACTION MA to get a quote for stock fencing and post and wire/rail fencing and contact Sam Buckland for more info on historical grazing issue.

ACTION GP to organize bioblitz event at Tanyard for Garden & Arts event.

8) **Henfield Common**

a) Update on recent works:

- MA reported that the sinkhole and broken clay pipe is still waiting to be repaired due to wet weather. The pipe will be repaired and unblocked so that water from the surface water drain can flow into the reedbed again.
- JC said that the dangerous oak limb on HC was dealt with by unknown people before ID Verde could get to the job. NM aware.
- Process to deal with blockages on paths agreed. Initially to be reported to DN (unless obviously too large for him to deal with) and DN will assess. If he can't do the job, he will pass on to HDC.
- NM is organizing an arboricultural survey for HC, BC and OC.
- NM asked if anyone knew who has tagged trees with silver id tags. JW says it was Andrew Sharp. Possibly records kept in office.
- TB and JW said they have cleared culverts under main path. It was made difficult in one place due to tree works completed by ID Verde blocking the outlet. Neal and HCV to communicate if future works take place to avoid recurrence of issue.
- TB and JW said the HCV and the CPT have cleared bramble from the reedbed and well as removing willow using tree poppers. Very difficult due to the ground conditions and the trees being previously coppiced.

- JC said an oak had to be cleared from HC and pictures of the tree was send to residents in advance explaining works, which was a good way to communicate regarding the works and get people on board.

ACTION All to report fallen branches/trees over paths to HPC/HDC as appropriate.

ACTION GP to check office for records of silver tree id tags.

9) Broadmere Common

a) Recent review

- Some ash dieback works have been completed by ID Verde.
- DN and CPT have cleared some willow in Area 1 – brash needs to be dragged and burnt in the designated area on the other side of the lane.
- HCV are planning to do some coppicing at BC next.
- MA mentioned water levels in pond house pond are controlled by pond house pond.
- MA is scheduling pond surveys for BC next year. These are to include amphibians, dragonflies, wetland plants and macro invertebrates. Volunteer surveyors required. MA to share plan with GP and TB when ready.

ACTION MA to finalise survey plans and share with GP and TB

10) Oreham Common

- a) New management plan to be commissioned, but this has not yet progressed.

11) Correspondence – none

12) Budget/expenditure – PC said £10,000 still to spend this financial year. Could potentially include arb surveys for HC and BC, fencing the Tanyard, eDNA surveys for ponds at BC, additional tree works at BC. Quotes are being obtained by NM and MA for works before proceeding.

13) AOB - none

14) Date of Next meeting – TBC - PC and RN to share potential dates when they have spoken to Legal