

Runnymede Borough CouncilChertsey Meads Management Liaison GroupTuesday, 5 September 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the
Group present:

Councillors M Nuti (Chairman), J Mavi,
J Alexander, R Deacock, G Drake, K Drury, S Hall, N Johnson,
C Longman, M Nichols, C Noakes, B Phillips and T A Stevens.

Members of the
Group absent:

R Arbery, T Athersuch, P Bickford, D Cotty, J Denton, I Girvan, F Harmer,
J Hearne, G James, J O'Gorman, M Ray and D Turner.

In attendance:

C Swatridge and H Wilson (non voting advisory members)

Also attended by H Clark and D Williams

1 **Election of Chair**

Councillor M Nuti was elected as Chairman for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2023/2024.

2 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from R Arbery, T Athersuch, P Bickford, D Cotty, J Denton, I Girvan, F Harmer, J Hearne, G James, J O'Gorman, M Ray and D Turner.

4 **Membership of the Management Liaison Group**

The Group welcomed Councillor J Mavi, and Miss Helen Wilson, new Deputy Green Spaces Manager, noting that the Green Spaces Manager had retired recently and that the fourth non-voting advisory member in Community Services had started in post that day.

Members were sad that Mrs Baldwin one of the residents' representatives had passed away and that Mrs Lane and Mr Goddard had retired owing to ill health. Both had been thanked for their service to the Group. Former Councillor Cotty had now become a residents' representative and good wishes were sent to him for a speedy recovery.

Apologies for absence were received from Miss Arbery, who had replaced Mr Mead, as the second representative from Chertsey Agricultural Association.

5 **Update on Actions from the Last Meeting**

Two specific issues were discussed. These were the overstay moorers and the prospect of introducing fire breaks on the Meads.

Officers were following up various options regarding how to deal with the two vessels semi-

permanently moored beside the picnic area. Whether they were occupied all the time was doubtful. However, they remained a problem, albeit one that had been put up with for a number of years. The option to charge for moorings might be investigated. Generally, the Group thought the best option would be to replicate the byelaws introduced by Spelthorne Borough Council; the downside being a lack of enforcement resource. There was concern that issues in neighbouring boroughs would become a problem for the Meads. The Chairman instructed that any progress; including a detailed, costed plan and timescales be communicated to the Group when available rather than waiting until the next meeting if at all possible.

The issue of fire breaks was not generally welcomed owing to the cost of having to obtain the right equipment to 'cut and collect' and the need to promote the bio-diversity of the site. Wider paths were not good for the ecology and actually presented a greater risk. However, it was agreed that a fire plan should be included in the overall review of the management plan. It was also intended to improve the seasonal signage prohibiting the use of BBQ equipment which continued to pose a problem, less so owing to the weather over the last summer, but still a risk. A recent incident was cited of damage to trees by people camping on the Meads but the Police did not attend; another of an unauthorised encampment elsewhere on the Meads was reported. Officers had limited resource to attend but would if possible, bearing in mind the Police held the powers. It was agreed that more use of the Council's social media and more information on the website would assist.

There was some discussion about the location of fire hydrants and Officers asked for it to be noted that those nearest the Meads were x2 at Dockett Eddy, x2 at the Marina and x1 at Meadow View.

6 Management and Maintenance

Members discussed various issues relating to management and maintenance. With regard to the height barrier, Safer Runnymede were unable to keep operating the barrier during the day, and it had in practice been kept open until late at night. In order to address concerns about safety and access, Officers agreed to discuss the issues with the Safer Runnymede manager to find a workable and consistent solution.

It was noted that the SANGs management plan for Chertsey Meads was the overarching document under which the Management Plan sat. The management plan was due for renewal in 2025 in consultation with Surrey Wildlife Trust and the Group. Members observed that it had not always been possible to comply with the management plan in the past and Officers aimed to revive it. It was agreed that as a living document; it should be flexible and encompass an holistic approach; balancing protection and enhancement of the Meads with its public use. Officers intended to produce a list of projects that could be funded by SANGs which would sit alongside the refreshed management plan; the latter including a review of grounds maintenance, the timing of various tasks and ensuring the biodiversity was a priority. SANGs projects included signage, interpretation, path maintenance as well as some biodiversity improvements such as hedge planting, pond maintenance and the installation of scrapes. Officers agreed to circulate a copy of the SANG management plan. A series of improvements would be taking place in the winter, as part of the ESSO funding and it was planned for further works in the winter of 2024. A copy of the management plan would be brought back to the Group for further discussion.

Members were advised that a combination of events had resulted in a significant number of the young whips forming the tree screen between the Meads and the Traylens site being destroyed. Members reported an amount of plastic shards in the area which needed to be removed. SANGs funding could be used for re-planting, marking out the area and the installation of an interpretation board, thus presenting a good opportunity for a community volunteer event. Officers were directed towards what had been done at Cowey Sale as an example of best practice.

Linked to the subject of tree maintenance were the reed beds which had not been cut for some time and which it was thought were expanding such that they were beginning to dominate the area. Members were advised that any cuttings had to be removed to take away the nutrients to promote biodiversity. Officers would build this into the schedule, noting that the best time to make the reed bed cut was October/November.

Members were updated on reinstatement of the Meads following the Esso pipeline works. The revised timeline was noted but a final date had not been determined as it was subject to weather conditions. It was hoped that Esso would be off-site by the end of September 2023. There would be a snagging list agreed between all parties to include works not already identified for reparation. It was confirmed that the road from the barrier to the point beyond which Esso had not reached would be repaired 'like for like' including the track to Dumsey Stump. The Group identified that Esso's vehicles had also used the road to some of the residential properties and the Marina for turning. Residents were asked to submit photographic evidence to the openspace@runnymede.gov.uk for consideration. This in box was monitored on a daily basis and could also be used to report issues to be followed up.

The Chairman agreed to pursue the issue of damage to Mead Lane leading to the Meads before the height barrier, acknowledging that this did fall under the remit of Surrey County Council Highways.

With regard to those areas that had been re-instated it had been agreed that these would not be mown for at least 12 months to allow the land to recover and re-seed, evidence of which was already being seen.

Esso had agreed to fund various environmental improvement works including hedge gapping, reinstatement of a pond to the left of the reed beds, tree works and other areas affected by their presence. The procurement of these works was in hand using a framework to select the most suitable contractors.

The Group discussed the timing of the hay cut, it had been too early in 2023, and as a result the biodiversity of the site had been adversely affected, including pyramidal orchids in the area adjoining Hamm Court as reported by a member of the Group and giving rise to concern about the welfare of ground nesting birds. Officers in Green Spaces were working closely with the Council's Grounds Maintenance team to ensure timely delivery and in accordance with the Management Plan. For example, in future the annual hay cut and hedge trim would take place later in the season and arisings taken from site. Notwithstanding the ongoing problem with Neospora.

Officers advised that the Stewardship Agreement for Chertsey Meads had been renewed for another year.

7 Events

Unfortunately, the Chertsey Agricultural Association representatives were unable to attend the meeting to feedback on the show. Those who had attended said it had gone well and that the 1 way traffic system for residents had worked.

Officers would be meeting separately with the Association to formalise the future maintenance arrangements prior to the next show to meet the requirements of the Council's Events Policy and any other conditions deemed suitable.

It was agreed that it would be positive to make the annual site visit a more inclusive event. It was suggested that a date in June be set and to make this a survey of the re-mergence of flora and fauna post Esso.

Members were keen to re-instate the litter picks. These would be facilitated by the newly appointed Community Development Projects Officer in liaison with Green Spaces.

[A date of Sunday 7 April 2024 was set for the next litter pick and the annual site visit would be advised in due course.]

Officers also took the opportunity to thank the many residents who had organised and carried out more regular informal litter picks.

8 **Any other Business**

Officers reported that sadly the Council had not been successful in a bid for funding from Defra's Species Survival Fund which would have been worth £300k. The timing had been very challenging. However, the process had enabled Officers to identify some future improvements to the Meads that could be made. For example, the installation of grazing infrastructure and the procurement of hay machinery to bring the hay operation in-house. Future funding opportunities would be looked at, utilising the knowledge of the Council's newly appointed Biodiversity Officer.

The following matters were highlighted:

A request for warning signs and/or staggered fencing in the vicinity of the boardwalk to alert both motorists and pedestrians of the road.

Replacement of damaged signs alerting people to the play area and to promote road safety

Potholes in the vicinity of Dockett Moorings

Reinstatement of the pond behind the reed beds on the right of Mead Lane, subject to maintaining the natural water levels on site and consideration of why it had dried up

Damage to grass verges for which photographic evidence should be submitted to Green Spaces.

Officers agreed to meet a few residents on site to have a look at some of the issues being raised and how best to resolve them.

9 **Dates of Future Meetings**

The following dates were noted for future meetings of the Group;
Tuesday 27 February and Tuesday 3 September 2024

(The meeting ended at 8.55 pm.)

Chairman