

Runnymede Borough Council

Chertsey Meads Management Liaison Group

Tuesday, 6 September 2022 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors D Cotty (Chairman), M Nuti, J Alexander, P Bickford, G Drake, A Goddard, S Hall, J Hearne, N Johnson, C Longman, M Nichols, C Noakes, J O'Gorman, M Ray, T A Stevens and D Turner.

Members of the Committee absent: T Athersuch, V Baldwin, R Deacock, J Denton, K Drury, I Girvan, F Harmer, G James, H Lane, D Mead and B Phillips.

In attendance: Councillor S Saise-Marshall.

1 Election of Chairman

Councillor D Cotty was re-elected as Chairman for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2022/2023.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3 Membership of the Management Liaison Group

Following a successful recruitment drive earlier in the year, new members of the Group were welcomed to the meeting and an updated copy of the Group's Constitution was noted to reflect this accordingly. There were now 15 categories of voting members and 26 people filling those roles, supported by 2 advisory members representing the Council's Green Space team. There was also a waiting list and people the secretary kept in touch with to notify them of events such as the site visit and litter pick.

Since the last meeting, Chris Dulley, Assistant Head of Green Space, had sadly left the Council and Peter Joyce, Interim Head of Green Space, was introduced to the meeting.

4 Update on Actions from the Last Meeting

Mr Joyce provided members with an update on some of the actions since the last meeting.

Moorings – Officers were having on-going discussions with regard to how to address the long standing problem with over stay moorers. It was thought that one of the vessels was being occupied from time to time. When challenged by a member of the Group they had refused to comply with the byelaws which only permitted short stay moorings. In addition, a danger of oil spillage into The Thames was observed. Members considered more robust signage was required.

Mr Joyce confirmed that a site visit would take place in the near future with the new Corporate Head of Environmental Services and the Council's newly appointed Property Lawyer under whom the operational elements of Green Space were likely to sit following a departmental restructure.

SANGs leaflet dispenser – The dispenser had been replaced and replenished. Mr Joyce

asked for a volunteer who could keep it stocked up as it appeared that 2,000 had been distributed.

UK Power Networks (UKPN) – Members noted that progress had been made, a route identified, the necessary wayleave applied for by UKPN and approved by Fields in Trust, and plans in hand for completion of the new cable so that a new and more robust power supply to Dumsey Stump could be achieved which could also facilitate further improvements to car park 2. It had been advised by the Council's Property Lawyer that a botanical survey should be commissioned prior to works commencing.

Bridge Repairs – The metal railings had been removed from the concrete bridge through to the fields leading to Hamm Court and Meadowlands but no further works had taken place.

5 **Security and Anti-Social Behaviour**

The Group discussed recent anti-social behaviour which intensified in the summer months. Examples included BBQs, bonfires, gatherings and overnight camping, as well as fly tipping, vandalism of signage and using car park 2 as a meeting place for people having impromptu raves. All of these contravened the byelaws.

Incidents had been reported to the Police, but their limited resources meant that residents were often in the position of having to challenge these visitors on The Meads which resulted on some occasions in aggressive behaviour towards the residents

The lack of a toilet on site and problems with accessing the one at a nearby local public house which was in theory meant to be available to the public under an historic section 106 agreement did not help matters.

The improvements to car park 2 (resurfacing and a new manual lockable gate) were welcomed and it was suggested that the use of deployable CCTV cameras rather than expensive permanent fixtures linked to Safer Runnymede might assist in identifying the persistent offenders. It was agreed that additional bee bumps along the approach road might deter speeding vehicles, subject to funding being available.

Generally speaking, the Group did not favour additional gates at either location suggested by the Council's Community Safety Officer owing to concerns about displacement and access for emergency vehicles. If the main entrance to The Meads could be maintained in working order members considered this should be sufficient.

Mr Joyce agreed to investigate the installation of a temporary toilet on site as well as more robust signage in the two main beach areas and car parks to cover the forms of anti-social behaviour discussed at the meeting and the dangers of causing fires in the area. He offered to have a site visit with interested members of the Group to see where concerns lay and discuss possible solutions.

6 **Management and Maintenance**

Mr Joyce updated members on various management and maintenance issues:

Height Barrier – the height barrier at the main entrance of The Meads which was thought to be functioning was in fact permanently open. It was thought that this was owing to the heavy traffic flow associated with the Esso pipeline replacement works. [It has since been confirmed that there was an issue with the position of the crane in the boatyard and sightlines for the Safer Runnymede camera which Officers are pursuing.] Ideally, the Group preferred that the barrier was closed, especially overnight, and people wanting access would need to press the button for it to be opened.

SANG projects – the picnic benches had been repainted and tarmacking of unsurfaced

passing places had been completed; with a further area which needed to be done as identified by the Chairman. As agreed in the item on security and anti-social behaviour more robust, permanent signage would be investigated to replace those vandalised during the summer. New finger posts were yet to be installed as was agreement with the County Council regarding the positioning of a new brown attraction sign to The Meads.

Tree Funding – Members reported that approximately half of the newly planted tree screen had been adversely affected by the recent heatwave, being swamped by grass and other damage caused by vandalism. A Group member had sent photos to the Council's DSO Manager. These issues would be followed up with the Council's Tree Officer in Green Space.

Esso Pipeline – Members noted that owing to a number of factors work on replacing the Esso pipeline was behind schedule and the position had not changed since the Group had been sent an email in early August. Reinstatement of the area when the works were complete was unlikely to take place before November 2022. An archaeological report from Esso on some artifacts found during the excavation works was awaited and a site inspection would be required before reinstatement could take place. It was suggested that consideration be given to replacing the sleeper posts with something more reliable and cost efficient. Mr Joyce agreed to look into this and ascertain whether SANGs monies might be available, or from Esso.

Members had positive feedback about the seven different contractors on site who had proactively assisted with some deer which had got trapped in the site enclosure and were also providing a security presence at the weekend.

Neospora – signage to deter dog walkers from allowing the spread of this disease was noted, but no visible improvement was reported.

Retirement of tenant farmer – The Group was sorry to learn of the imminent retirement of the tenant farmer. An alternative contractor had been used to do the annual hay cut.

Issues had arisen with regard to the recent wild fires elsewhere in the South East. Smoke had covered parts of the Meads when the fire at Hankley Common in July had occurred causing concern and distress for residents at The Meads. It was confirmed by the Group that consideration had not been given to natural fire breaks, corridors of wider strips of mown paths to reduce the risk of fire spreading across large areas. Mr Joyce suggested he investigate this further in consultation with local and statutory stakeholders, as any measures would need the necessary approvals.

Other maintenance issues were raised including:

- A request for the Horse margin signs to be more visible to deter riders from straying into the field around Hamm Court
- A request for an inspection and audit of the tree screen
- Inspection of a low hanging willow tree on the cycle path at Brackendene and a fallen tree in Fox Copse near Meadow View
- Trimming of the hedgerow beyond the Boardwalk to the end of Mead Lane and into Dockett Eddy
- A request for signage on the opposite side of the boardwalk was made to alert both pedestrians and traffic to its access point

7

Annual Management Plan

The group discussed aspects of the Annual Management Plan. It was noted that the Reed beds had not been cut in accordance with the plan and paths that were usually cut through the grass had not happened this year.

Mr Joyce advised the group that grounds maintenance was being brought back in house in 2023, and that these issues would be addressed through a work programme. This would have to comply with the Management Plan, in consultation with the Group.

With regard to the reed beds it was suggested by Mr Turner that the services of a reed bed cutter with a horse might be a good way of achieving the agreed every other year cut on either side of Mead Lane, and could also be a tourist attraction. Procurement of work of this nature would need to comply with the Council's relevant Standing Orders.

8 **Events**

Chertsey Show

Another successful Chertsey Show was recorded, despite the challenges of the location and the heatwave. Being further down Mead Lane had meant a longer walk to the show but most people had managed to cope.

Mr Turner raised the issue of being charged £3,000 for refuse clearance which hitherto had not been the Council's practice. It was hoped this would be resolved for the 2023 show.

In terms of activities associated with the Show it was suggested that some or all of the wooden sleeper posts could be replaced by a new hedgerow along Mead Lane and an attraction for visitors if hedge laying and maintenance was part of the Show. Such activity would have to be consulted on with stakeholders such as Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey Botanical Society whose representatives were unable to attend the meeting.

Annual Site Visit

Owing to resource issues the site visit in 2022 had been cancelled. It was hoped that a visit could take place in 2023 and ideas included a walk led by Pete Bickford before mid-April or one later in June/July being the deferred visit to be led by Dr Denton. The Group's secretary would send an email to gauge views.

Litter Pick

The next litter picks would take place on Sunday 16 October 2022, meeting at 10am in the second car park and Sunday 16 April 2023, also at 10am but meeting in the first car park.

9 **Any other Business**

The Group wished to formally recognise Benedict Miller, one of the Council's Green Space Officers, for his quick and effective response to incidents on Chertsey Meads including putting signs up in his own time to advise visitors and help protect the Meads from the dangers of bonfires and other anti-social behaviour.

Members were also keen to emphasise the positive aspects of Chertsey Meads which was after all a very special place to live and visit. People could participate in a variety of leisure pursuits such as paddle boarding, boating and similar, in addition to the land based activities.

10 **Dates of Future meetings**

The following dates were noted for the next scheduled meetings of the Liaison Group to take place at the Civic Centre in Addlestone:

Tuesday 28 February at 7.30pm

Tuesday 5 September 2023 at 7.30pm

(The meeting ended at 8.41 pm.)

Chairman