

Minutes of a meeting of the Monks Wall Nature Reserve Management Committee, 18th July 2016, in the Council Chamber, Guildhall, Sandwich at 7:00pm

Present: The Mayor, Cllr Paul Graeme (in the Chair)
Cllr RA Daw
Cllr JE Franklin
Cllr JJ Watts
Dr A Lipczynski

Officer: Ms T. Weir

09.07.16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Mrs Lioté (due to a family commitment), Mr Chapman (who was on holiday) and Dr Walkey (who had an appointment).

10.07.16 DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

11.07.16 MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of 18th April 2016 and there were no matters arising not already covered elsewhere on the agenda. Cllr Watts reiterated his view expressed at Council that he regretted angling was no longer permitted on the Reserve.

12.07.16 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

(i) It was AGREED that under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (as extended by s.100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

(ii) The Committee received and noted a report by Julian Sampson of Finn's, dated 15th June 2016, regarding negotiations with the Environment Agency concerning Monks Wall Nature Reserve (nb. that this report was considered by Sandwich Town Council at its meeting of 25th June 2016 and Council resolved to formally instruct Mr Sampson to pursue what claims he can with regard to the agricultural and Nature Reserve losses in so far as the law and negotiation allows – however, the report was resubmitted to the Committee for the information of non-councillor Committee members).

13.07.16 REPORT: GW FINN & SONS (NOW FINN'S)

The Committee received a verbal report from Mark Chandler (Finn's) regarding management of the Reserve, as well as updates regarding negotiations with the Environment Agency and related issues.

It was noted that in due course a new management plan for the Reserve would be needed as the Environment Agency had finished its main works on site and as a new Warden was now in place – Ms Weir informed the Committee that

the current, interim Management Plan was due to be reviewed at the Committee meeting in October 2016 (recommendation by Committee at minute point 07.10.15, approved by Council at minute point 27.10.15). Concern was expressed that following the Agency works there was no standing water on the Reserve and that this situation continued, meaning that there had been shrinkage around posts and pipework and that compliance with the interim Management Plan was impossible. Mr Chandler informed the Committee that he had requested a sluice key from the Environment Agency for the Warden (as management of the water level on the Reserve is within the Warden's job description) and that the Warden would need to receive operation instructions from the Agency.

It was also noted that the Reserve remained closed pending effective mitigation of various health and safety issues identified at a site meeting in May. Mr Chandler informed the Committee that the Environment Agency might be willing to install safety signage but had expressed the view that its installations met acceptable health and safety standards. Committee members expressed a view that safety measures around sluice installations along the new Coastal Path were more substantial. Negotiation about these issues as well as bank cutting, terms of maintenance and reinstatement of the land continued and Mr Chandler informed the Committee that he hoped they may be concluded by the time of the October Committee meeting – however, this could not be guaranteed. Regarding bank cutting, Mr Chandler pointed out that the Environment Agency would wish to carry this out regularly at least in the short term so as to help stabilise the spillway matting but he suggested it may be worth approaching the Agency to see if their 'no graze' policy for the banks could be relaxed to allow grazing by sheep.

Regarding angling, Mr Chandler stated that at present this could not practically be permitted on the Reserve due to health and safety issues, without considerable investment it was not likely this could go forward.

Mr Chandler reported that there were many thistles on the Reserve, Committee members suggested that flailing the thistles soon and leaving them to be eaten by cattle would be an acceptable measure for the present.

Mr Chandler stated that he had been contacted by GTC looking to carry out works on a valve in the field adjacent to Monks Way – he would follow this up to ascertain whether or not they intended to proceed with these works.

Lastly, Mr Chandler informed the Committee that there was some uncertainty regarding new applications to the Higher Level Stewardship scheme following the EU Referendum ('Brexit'). He was seeking further information and would report back to the next meeting of the Committee. The Committee thanked Mr Chandler for his report.

RECOMMENDATIONS: (i) That the Town Clerk's office draft a letter to the Environment Agency requesting that action be taken to address health & safety issues around its installations on the Reserve and to address the water levels on the Reserve which were insufficient to comply with the interim Management Plan. This letter should be finalised with assistance from Mr Chandler and his colleague Julian Sampson. A copy of the health & safety site visit report by Sheila Coupe (East Kent Human Resources) and copies of photographs, for comparison, of Agency installations on the Reserve and along the Coastal Footpath (at Bloody Point and the bottom of the Narrows) should be included with the letter.

(ii) That the Environment Agency be permitted to cut the banks as and when they require but that Mr Chandler open discussions with the Agency (and if necessary with the grazier) regarding grazing of the banks by sheep.

(iii) That Mr Chandler seek a quote for flailing of the areas of the Reserve affected by excess thistle growth and, subject to agreement of this expenditure by Sandwich Town Council, make the necessary arrangements for this work to progress.

14.07.16 WARDEN'S REPORT

The Committee received and noted a written report from the MWNR Warden, Mr Ken Chapman (copy attached to these minutes).

15.07.16 HEALTH & SAFETY

The Committee received and considered a report regarding health and safety matters on the Reserve by Sheila Coupe, H&S Advisor, East Kent Human Resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS: (i) That Finn's pursue as far as possible mitigation of health & safety issues on site by the Environment Agency and make a progress report to the next Committee meeting.

(ii) That the Reserve remain closed in the meantime.

16.07.16 COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Committee considered potentially suitable candidates to be invited to fill the vacancy for a non-councillor Committee member. It was noted that a Mr Alastair Henderson had been approached regarding this position.

RECOMMENDATION: That Dr Lipczynski discuss membership of the Committee with Mr Henderson and, if he is willing to join the Committee, that he be admitted to non-councillor Committee membership immediately.

17.07.16 FINANCE

(i) The Committee received and noted a statement of the Monks Wall Nature Reserve balance as at 30th June 2016.

(ii) The Committee considered any forthcoming expenditure / income relevant to the Monks Wall Nature Reserve budget (the Committee on 18th January 2016 recommended and Council on 25th January resolved "*that the Budget continue to be brought back as a recurring item on Committee agendas until further notice*" [minute points 20.01.16 and 29.01.16]). It was noted that capital expenditure would be required in due course to carry out fencing works alongside the Monks Way but that it had been hoped this could be funded through the Higher Level Stewardship scheme – Mr Chandler would report back on this to the next Committee meeting.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Budget be put on the next Committee agenda and that Mr Chandler report back to that meeting regarding the Higher Level Stewardship scheme application.

18.07.16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 17th October 2016, at 7pm, in the Council Chamber.