Earlswood and Redhill Steering Group meeting minutes

Tuesday 18th February 2020, 6.30 pm, Town Hall

1. Welcome and apologies

Present: Cllr Natalie Bramhall (Chair), David Watts (RBBC), Simon Elson (RACV), John Potts (Friends of Swan Group), Bernard Fiest (Merstham Cricket Club), John Cumberland (Reigate Society), Matt Pipe (Horley Piscatorial), Tommy Matthews (Earlswood Boats and Cafe), Cllr King

Absent: Nick Faulkes (Environment Agency), Cllr Kulka, Cllr Brown, James Simmons (Earlswood Boats and Café)

1. Minutes of the last meeting

BF reported that the draft lease for the Cricket Pavilion is awaiting formal consent from Planning but recent communication suggests it is developing well.

JP reported the he had recently rescued a Swan with a BTO leg ring that had been put on incorrectly. DW will ask Mark Stanley if he knows anything about unlicensed ringers operating in the area.

DW confirmed that hedge row tree plants have been ordered to plant in the hedge line along Woodhatch Road. They are expected to be delivered within the next two weeks.

Cllr Bramhall has not yet made contact with St Johns School regarding Steering Group membership. DW reported that he encountered St Johns School on Redhill Common conducting an outdoor class which was very encouraging to see, he talked briefly to the Headmaster.

All minutes from the last meeting agreed.

1. Matters arising

No matters were raised.

1. Updates on habitat conservation works

DW reported to the group on the recent habitat conservation works carried by RBBC Countryside service. Scrub clearance in species rich grass areas on Earlswood Common, Petridgewood Common and Whitebushes Common.

SE commented that RACV has in the past carried out works in Petridgewood Common but ceased due to the Cricket Club breaching their lease arrangements with RBBC and volunteer cars being broken into in the car park.

It was queried whether there has been a representative from Salfords Cricket Club attending the Steering Group meetings, it was confirmed that there has been but a long time ago. DW commented that he did try to make contact with the leaseholder to notify them of works but never received any replies or acknowledgment.

**Action. DW to send the Salfords Cricket Club contact details to the Chair.**

DW also reported that restoration works have begun on the pond at Redhill Common, SE was critical of the works complaining that only a small area of the pond has been cleared and the cuttings stacked onsite. DW replied that he does not know the original size of the pond so only what was visible was cleared. DW thanked SE for his recent works on the Redhill Common viewpoint, SE replied that RACV have only been there once this year.

DW reported he has postponed conservation works at Newpond Farm due to waterlogged ground conditions. SE was critical of this and he stated that they could have walked over the site as RACV do. DW commented that in his view it would not be practical to carry all the equipment between two members of staff and he took the decision to postpone.

1. Redhill Common: Heath habitat

DW expressed his interest to restore the declining Heath habitat on Redhill Common but has no botanical records or historical records to guide him. SE confirmed that Heath plants did once grow here but due to lack of management and follow up on RACV work the habitat has declined. DW asked the group whether anyone had any information. Both SE and JC offered to send any information if they could find it.

MP suggested asking Surrey Wildlife Trust to see if they held any information, others suggested St Johns School may have some records.

1. AOB

The Chair outlined a request from the organisers of the Earlswood Carnival to relocate their annual event from the Woodland Road green area of the Common to near the Lakes and Café. She confirmed that following a request some weeks ago RBBC have installed a drop post between the recently made earth embankments to provide access for the event. She also reiterated that Earlswood Common is LNR and over commercialisation should be avoided. The group were in agreement that they did not support this request and that Woodland Road should continue to be used for such events.

**Action DW to notify Carnival organiser of the decision**.

MP reported on the success of the netting operation in November. All the large specimen fish were removed and relocated to the lower lake. The water levels in the top lake recovered very quickly following a spell of heavy rain. MP thanked RBBC for their assistance with the operation. SE contested the amount of smaller fish remaining in the top lake. MP replied outlining that small fish would have slipped through the holes in the nets used, SE was critical of the impact this would have on the ecology of the lake. MP pointed out that the small fish remaining would support the food chain that birds such as Grebes and Tufted ducks require, and that aquatic vegetation would not be adversely affected. MP is willing to provide SE with an ecological justification regarding the ratio of small fish to the water body size.

Cllr King suggested that a more proactive measure could have been taken so that more people were notified in advance of the netting operation, he did not know the full details of the operation. The Chair replied stating that if he attended the last meeting he would have been informed or he could have read the minutes, contacted her or DW. MP also stated that publicity was kept minimal deliberately to ensure that unwanted attention was not present, he had prepared a method statement which was given to RBBC in the event of further enquiries.

MP confirmed that the new swan ramp has arrived, and it will be installed at the lower lake within two weeks. He also asked whether Horley Piscatorial Society could reseed eroded areas around the fishing pegs. DW said this should not be a problem and that amenity rye grass seed should be suitable. SE was critical and stated that the exact prescription should be given to ensure that the areas are seeded appropriately. DW will seek advice from RBBC Grounds Maintenance Team.

**Action DW to speak to Grounds Maintenance about this and advice MP.**

DW requested approval to plant an Oak tree in a gap in the woodland at the edge of the top lake to replace a large Oak that came down last year. There was full support for this.

SE queried when the Management Plan would be renewed. DW replied that he is keen to do this but would like to have the Reigate Heath Management Plan complete before work begins on this. The Chair agreed that this item will be on the next agenda and DW will send an electronic copy to all members.

**Action DW to send copy of Management Plan to all members by email.**

BF reported that the next cricket match is scheduled for the 24th April.

The Chair outlined SCC’s pledge to plant more trees in the borough as part of the initiative to tackle climate change. She requested that all members send any location they or their representative groups think are suitable to Greenspaces for review. SE commented that the Surrey Nature Partnership have recently developed a decision-making framework to enable tree planting locations to be chosen appropriately without compromising other priority habitats. DW confirmed that RBBC is using this model to guide tree planting in the borough.

1. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be a walk around Earlswood and Redhill Common starting from the Lakes. Date to be arranged via email.