# REIGATE HEATH STEERING GROUP Meeting via Zoom video 22nd December 2021 5.30 pm M I N U T E S

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| Membership | | | | Comment |
| Name |  | **Position/Representation** | |  |
| Cllr Natalie Bramhall | **NB** | Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services  (Chairman) | (Cllr) | Apologies |
| Cllr Michael Blacker | **MB** | Ward Councillor (Deputy Chairman) | (Cllr) | Present |
| Cllr Rosemary Absalom | **RA** | Ward Councillor | (Co-opted Cllr) | Present |
| Cllr Christopher Whinney | **CW** | Ward Councillor | (Co-opted Cllr) | Present |
| Mr David Watts | **DW** | Secretary | (RBBC Officer) | Present |
| Ms Holly Short | **DB** | Reigate Heath Residents’ Association | | Apologies |
| Mr Steve Carter | **SC** | Veterinary Adviser | | Absent |
| Mr Simon Elson | **SE** | Reigate Area Conservation Volunteers | | Present |
| Mr Dave Clarke | **DW** | Reigate Heath Golf Club | | Apologies |
| Ms Elinor Leech | **EL** | Reigate Heath Horseriders | | Present |
| Ms Susan Medcalf | **SM** | Botanist | (Co-opted) | Present |
| Ms Jenny Newell | **JN** | Surrey Archaeological Society | | Present |
| Mr Trevor Mansfield | **TM** | Natural England | | Apologies |

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| 21/01 | Chair’s opening remarks and meeting attendance |
|  | The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting. |

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| 21/02 | Apologies for absence |
|  | Cllr Bramhall, Holly Short, Dave Clarke, Trevor Mansfied |

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| 21/03 | Minutes of the last meeting |
|  | Actions from last meeting  21/03 Carried forward from last meeting. MB has attempted contact with Charles Wragg but has still had no response. Unresolved.  21/03 Actioned. Complaints of too many signs installed. CW will report feedback from local residents. No comment from CW. Unresolved.  21/03 Actioned. Repairs to car park potholes have been made. CW reported a dangerous gap between car park edge and road that needs addressing.  21/03 Actioned. DW to send copy to CW to comment. Following this DW will send a copy to Andrew Benson Head of Planning at RBBC. No comment from CW. Unresolved.  21/03 RA apologised for not sharing the bat report, she will as soon as it has been proofread. Unresolved.  21/05 Actioned. DW has cross referenced horse ride repairs with Countryside Stewardship Agreement. To be discussed under item 7.  21/07 NB was not present so unable to comment. Carried forward to next meeting.  The minutes were agreed. |

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| 21/04 | Replacement of Memorial Bench |
|  | DW sought agreement on two proposals to replace benches – one that’s situated in a heather area by the golf course. This is in an unsuitable location being close to a heather area. DW proposed to replace this one and relocate to the other side by the scallop woodland edge near thirteenth fairway. The second bench is west of clubhouse on slope looking down towards golf course. SE suggested that it would be helpful if the bench locations were submitted prior to the meeting, this was agreed and will be done in future. DW will send members a location map of benches following the meeting.  DW also asked for thoughts about inscriptions rather than plaques on memorial benches. SE questioned the existing policy on who is responsible for the maintenance of benches and the allowance of inscriptions on memorial benches. DW replied that there is a policy on memorial bench maintenance being carried out by RBBC, inscriptions however are not fully detailed. Once a memorial bench is installed it becomes council property and can be removed if required. Donors are asked to sign an agreement to this. RA commented that the bench material would determine if inscriptions are possible, if it is recycled plastic then this may not be possible. JN added that recycled plastic bench types look good and natural. DW replied that the bench material is wood and that although recycled types are used in the borough they would be out of character on the heath and would be in conflict with the policy of reducing urban clutter. DW to send a copy of the bench model types to members following the meeting. |

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| 21/05 | Recent tree condition survey |
|  | DW reported that the 3 yearly tree condition survey has been carried out on the heath. The significant findings were that Oak Processionary Moth and Ash Dieback are both present on heath. DW has met with Bartletts tree experts to arrange manual removal of nests which is provisionally booked for January. Assent from Natural England has already been received, the standard treatment of nests is pesticide spraying however only removal by hand is permitted on SSSI’s.  SM questioned whether the survey is focussed on health and safety or tree health, DW confirmed that the survey takes both factors into account but identifying risks to public safety is the main purpose of a tree survey, for example removal of OPM nests next to public footpath or removal of dangerous trees next to properties.  JN reported that a moped is parked regularly by a sign saying not to park by a tree with OPM nests. SM asked can we cordon parking spaces off. DW commented that reasonable efforts have been made to prevent parking under the tree anything other than steel fences will be moved by the public.  CW asked should the group have seen the survey as part of the agenda, DW replied that the details of the survey are only accessible on his tree survey data base on his field tablet. A summary of the survey however can be shared with the group. DW to share this following the meeting.  MB asked what we can do about Ash Dieback, DW commented that the presence of this tree disease was expected as it is spreading throughout the brough from the north. The council has a schedule in place which uses a class stage monitoring process. Class 1 - 4 denotes the canopy cover left by infection rate, one being 100 per cent live canopy, 4 being less than 25 per cent live canopy remaining. This allows careful prioritising of remedial works. The current Forestry Commission policy is to only fell trees if they pose a safety risk, otherwise leave them. The council has already started work on removing trees affected close to properties in the north of the borough. MB asked whether there is a cure to Ash Dieback, DW replied that there is no cure, SE asked DW whether he has encountered any resistance from ash trees, DW replied that some mature trees seem to resist but the success rate is unpredictable. DW also added that felling any affected tree is a knee jerk reaction so we use the monitoring system and will leave infected trees unless they are in a high-risk area.  SM asked whether the tree condition survey covers the status of veteran tree and whether they need halo releasing. DW answered yes but not in great detail. The survey is more about safety conditions of trees for human and property. Although a veteran tree will be named as such in the survey and any works prescribed with this mind.  JN commented that the tree survey must take into account trees on barrows. Most trees looked fairly sturdy but would like to know if any are seen to be unstable on barrows. DW confirmed that where a tree is on a scheduled monument it is noted, so taken into account.  SM asked whether the survey picked up a Douglass fir that is a third dead from top down. In high winds these trees snap and it is by the bridle way. DW commented that he has only looked at urgent works but it is likely to be on the report.  SE queried whether the condition survey is an arboriculture survey rather than wider tree survey, DW replied that the survey is an arboriculture survey not a woodland condition survey.  CW asked when this survey was submitted to RBBC, DW replied that it was received in November. |

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| 21/06 | Soakaways drain at Golf Club |
|  | DW reported that Dave Clark was to give detail on this but is not in attendance. DW has looked at the drain with the golf club manager. It is a minor trench drain on golf club land, not RBBC land and not on the SSSI. No obvious negative impacts were visible. DW advised the golf club manager that in future they should liaise with Natural England on any works near the SSSI.  SE reported that he was alerted to a social media post about this, so he sent it to the steering group as RACV were being bombarded with enquires. SE was disappointed a representative from the golf club was not present to give an account.  MB agreed that it would have been helpful if a representative from the golf club was in attendance. RA commented that a soakaway drain is exactly that, whatever is going down it is soaking into surrounding land. Even if on golf club land there could be an impact on the surrounding heath so it is a requirement for the steering group/greenspaces to be notified.  DW commented that properties by the club house are reportedly being repeatedly flooded which is why drain was put in. SM stated that group members should be careful about any works, i.e., surfacing, that prevent infiltration of rain as it creates surface run off. MB asked whether the drain is up by clubhouse, DW confirmed that the drain is round back of clubhouse towards back of cottages and is a ditch/trench 30cm wide by 10ft (3m) long with a standard metal grill over it and appears very minor. |

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| 21/07 | Conservation works along the horse ride (enhancement of habitats) |
|  | DW confirmed that he has cross referenced proposals outlined in the recent report with the countryside stewardship agreement. At this stage he could phase several areas into works although he would need to discuss at habitat meeting in more detail. Path 1, behind carpark on north side – prescriptions in there was path work, no scrub clearance necessary. Path 2 which runs further along up to areas in lowland heath area – scrub clearance being carried out.  EL asked about next steps and the cost. The rider’s group could do a fundraising effort if useful. Any works to carry out repair works on the horse ride such as digging and reprofiling will need to be approved by Natural England as they would be classed as ‘Operations likely to damage SSSI’ Scrub clearance is already in the Countryside Stewardship agreement so would not need extra permissions. EL stated that the paths are so deep, scrub clearance not enough. Hand digging won’t be appropriate, so it is logical to ask Natural England.  JN commented that the gulley’s are a problem due to horses, MB commented that they are made worse by being narrow in places.  EL, JN, MB were supportive of the next steps in carrying out works.  RA asked whether DW could submit the report to natural England with recommendations. It was agreed that DW could do this. DW to submit report to Natural England and seek their advice. |
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| 21/08 | Management Plan |
|  | RA reported that she has looked at the Management Plan as it appears on RBBC website. It is a truncated version and elements are not present on the website. With regards to the AONB submission she is hoping that the document that goes forward is a full document rather than the website one as it is too short.  DW stated he is not sure if the one on the website has been modified.  CW stated that the new management plan is a 10-year plan rather than five year. There must be a clear indication as to what is going to happen in five years’ time. Amendments must be made, and he asked where fuller version will be and have actions been actioned. What’s going to happen after five years, where is the actual version and have we agreed it. DW confirmed that any changes that were required have been made and a copy was sent to all members some time ago.  SE expressed concern that the full plan is not on website. SM asked is there a point at which right document is needed? Do we need to ensure its fit for purpose?  MB answered yes to this question. MB and RA suggested that the new management plan has been adopted by the council, DW said he was not aware of this if so can it be put on the website? MB offered to provide details on the adoption of the management plan by the council. MB will find the date that it was adopted so we can then circulate it.  RA asked whether a copy could be sent again, DW said he could do this. DW to send plan around again. |

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| 21/09 | Work Programme |
|  | DW provided an update on future works which include tree removal on lowland heath areas. He has prepared plan where particular trees are and will circulate via email.  JN commented she was impressed with recent clearance on lowland heath areas. DW will pass this feedback on to the Ranger. DW added that stumps here and in RACV work areas will be treated.  SE reported that volunteers will continue their work in the new year. Other parties not here tonight seem to deviate and do their own thing and would like something done about that. It would be good to have a habitat subgroup meeting some point soon. He also added it’s very easy to take trees and scrub out, but if serious about heather restoration then need resources for ground prep. Limited follow up that comes which leads to bramble etc.  DW response to litter scrapes was that HLS budget doesn’t cater for it with the current expenditure on volunteer tasks. There may have to be year of reduced RACV works onsite to allow payment for a mechanical litter scrape. This will need to be talked about in a habitat subgroup meeting.  CW queried DW’s response on the budget has it been reduced? Has work programme been amended and would like have indication of that outside of this meeting. DW explained he was referring to the HLS budget which wouldn’t be able to cater for everything plus employing contractor to do litter scrape.  CW asked has the work budget been changed in any way, could we have details of how it’s been amended? DW asked what work budget was he referring to, HLS?  CW stated he is referring to the budget that starts in October. What has changed? Subject is work programme. Has anything changed or been reduced? Could we have details.  MB interjected that RBBC budget hasn’t changed. The HLS budget has halved since the last agreement which was approximately £50,000 over the ten-year period. JN asked how much clearing and raking after felling could be done by volunteers, SE replied that in theory it could all be done by volunteers but they like variety. Golf club will take a tree down and not follow up, then wonder why no heather regeneration. Need to look at this in more detail. |

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| 21/10 | Sports Pavilion: Condition of building and use for Surrey Arts Event |
|  | JN enquired about the small derelict hut behind pavilion that contains rubbish. Under whose ownership does it come under and can be it be removed. It attracts groups of youths and if they set fire to the hut the pavilion would go up in flames as well.  SM reported that she has been approached by Angela Hall (represented by resident’s association). She exhibits art through Surrey Arts and a group of artists would like to ask the council if the pavilion would be available for an event in June linked to the Surrey Hills AONB extension. Would RBBC be willing to let it to them free of charge?  RA confirmed that the pavilion has been used as an open studio in the past. If Surrey Arts want to link it to the AONB boundary review, there won’t be anything to put that on as it is still quite a way off. Surrey hills Arts as a standalone group could use it as a venue though. The building however will need clearing out as it’s used by football clubs every other weekend (15 times a year).  SM suggested it could be cleaned by volunteers such as the art group. SM also suggested the arts group sell artwork so could contribute money after profit towards pavilion  CW supported the view that building behind is a risk and needs to be reported and supported the request to use the pavilion. However, a decision probably won’t be able to be made until March at earliest. It should be used but a decision should be made so there is enough time to organise an event in June.  SE reported that football teams are blocking out car parks when football is played. Comparison of football and habitat growth should be monitored but doesn’t take place. |
| 21/11 | **Any other Business** |
|  | RA updated on the Surrey Hills AONB boundary review the first phase is evidence gathering which should be photographic material that supports the submission. Anyone can write in and provide their own submissions; however, the heath cannot be an isolated part of the AONB, evidence must show how it aligns with the wider landscape in the AONB. It would be a good idea if a little bit of the borough could be included. This will mean that if the Surrey Hills AONB covers Reigate heath, any planning application that is submitted would go over to Surrey Hills AONB planning for a consultation, the same as if living in conservation area would go to RBBC Conservation Officer in the Planning Team. Submissions to be in by the 31st January 2022. SE suggested that the Reigate Heath Visual assessment that may have useful photographs for submitting. RA stated her intention to go on Reigate Hill and take photos of Heath and make submission on surrey hills AONB.  RA reported car parks on Flanchford road need resurfacing – consideration as to how we can sort something out? Someone will damage vehicle and sue the council.  SM reported that she is working with Natural England on SSSI improvement on wetland interest (unit two) and is concerned about acid grassland management on the heath.  CW expressed the need to organise habitat subgroup and to have a meeting ASAP. He would like to know when that will happen. The car park is dangerous where the road joins the car park.  SE raised the issue of the car park being increasingly used by groups that disappear for day. This stops other users of the heath being able to use it. JN asked can we impose a time limit; this would be impossible to enforce.  EL commented that pay and display would be good, MB replied that this would be county council matter.  There is also increased fly tipping on eastern carpark.  The successful visitors survey could do with a follow up survey. There is a leaflet box on the pavilion that doesn’t get refilled. Can the leaflets be reprinted? RACV work that was been done in autumn has been well received by residents, but they were not aware of it. Residents’ association weren’t even aware of steering group. |

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| **21/12** | **Date of next meeting** |
|  | To be confirmed |

End of meeting.

**Table of actions**

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| Item | Actions |
| 21/03 | CW to provide comment of No parking signs and Utility Protocol paper |
| 21/03 | RA to share bat report |
| 21/03 | NB to provide progress on cycling enforcement measures from SCC Cllr |
| 21/04 | DW to share bench location map and bench models |
| 21/05 | DW to share summary of tree condition survey |
| 21/07 | DW to submit horse ride report to Natural England |
| 21/08 | MB to circulate the date of when the newest management plan was adopted by the council. DW to recirculate final copy |

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| 21/09 | RA to share bat and building report with group |
| 21/10 | DW to share Reigate Heath bat survey with TM |