

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, April 2010

Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on Monday 12 April 2010 at 5pm in the Information Centre, Wimbledon Common, London SW19 5NR.

Present: Mr A Simon (Chairman)
Sir Ian Andrews
Mrs D de Coverly Veale
Mr D Devons (Vice-Chairman)
Mr D Frampton
Dr S Frank
Mr J Horrocks
Mr N Plastow MBE

In attendance: Clerk & Ranger, Chief Executive (Mr G Vincent)
Deputy Clerk & Ranger (Ms P Graystone)
PA to the Clerk & Ranger (Miss A Evans)

3 members of the public were present for part of the meeting.

04.10.1 Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman for 2010/2011

On behalf of the Conservators, Mr Frampton thanked the outgoing Chairman, Mr David Devons, for being an exemplary Chairman over the past eight years, and for steering the Conservators through some difficult times during his chairmanship. He proposed a vote of thanks to Mr Devons and that was seconded by all the Conservators.

Mr Frampton proposed that Mr Andrew Simon be appointed as Chairman and this was seconded by Dr Frank. It was further proposed that Mr Devons be appointed as Vice-Chairman. This was seconded by Mrs de Coverly Veale. Mr Simon thanked the Conservators for their confidence and also expressed his personal thanks to Mr Devons for his immense contribution over recent years, particularly in respect of the complicated legal issues surrounding Mill House and Putney Hospital. Mr Devons thanked the Conservators for their kind comments.

04.10.2 Apologies

None

04.10.3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 8 March 2010 were approved subject to some minor amendments.

04.10.4 Matters Arising

Dog-Walkers on Putney Lower Common – Mr Horrocks said that he had not yet contacted Mr Hildesley of the Friends of Barnes Common as he had not had Mr Hildesley's e-mail address. The Chairman undertook to pass Mr Hildesley's contact details to Mr Horrocks.

Memorial Bench for Mr Ron Ribbins – The Clerk & Ranger reported that Mr Ribbins' son had visited the Ranger's Office and a location for a memorial bench had been chosen near the Windmill. The model of the Windmill that had been donated to the

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Conservators had now been received and placed in the Information Centre. A glass cover was currently being made for it.

Milestone on Putney Lower Common – Mr Devons reported that an article by Mr Hugh Thompson in the most recent Putney Society Bulletin about the decision not to remove the hoarding from around the milestone had been very uncomplimentary towards the Conservators. The Conservators agreed not to respond to the article.

Drinking Fountain – The Clerk & Ranger reported that he was still waiting for a quotation from the Drinking Fountain Association for the refurbishment of the drinking fountain.

Combat Against Cancer Run – The Clerk & Ranger reported that the comments made by the Conservators at their last meeting had been passed to the organiser of this event. Its planning was still at a very early stage, and he was still waiting for the requested information.

Women's Aid Event – The Clerk & Ranger reported that this event had been postponed by the organisers.

Farm Bog – Dr Frank reminded the Conservators that a Conservators' Walk at Farm Bog was organised for the following Friday. Conservators attending were asked to meet in Springwell Car Park at 2.30pm. Sir Ian Andrews and Mr Frampton apologised that they would be unable to attend.

Management of the Plain – Dr Frank reported that he was still preparing a paper setting out his research on the best ways to encourage Skylarks to nest on the Plain. He hoped to have it available for the May meeting.

Signs on Ponds – The Clerk & Ranger reported that signs had been placed around Kingsmere, Bluegate and Hookhamslade ponds asking dog-walkers to respect the nesting wildfowl and to keep their dogs out of the water.

04.10.5 Clerk & Ranger's Report

Pine Trees on Putney Lower Common – The Clerk & Ranger reported that several pine trees on Putney Lower Common, near the border with Barnes Common, had been chopped down. This vandalism had taken place after dark and there was no firm evidence to suggest who the culprit might be.

Ashlone Wharf – The Clerk & Ranger reported that he had written to Mr Steven Drennan at Bruton Knowles with details of the Conservators' requirements before permission would be given to the Environment Agency to use land at Putney Lower Common as a site base while carrying out repair work on Ashlone Wharf. A response was awaited.

Tibbet's Corner, Local Safety Scheme – The Clerk & Ranger reported that an on-site meeting was being arranged with Mr Jonathan Sanders of Wandsworth Council. It was hoped this could take place on 19 April.

Cemetery Lodge – The Clerk & Ranger reported that he, the Chairman and the Deputy Clerk & Ranger had attended the auction sale for the Cemetery Lodge on Lower

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Richmond Road and adjacent to Putney Lower Common. The property had sold for £435,000.

Windmill Car Park Toilets – The Clerk & Ranger reported that the refurbishment work to the toilets had begun on 2 April with the Ladies toilets, which would take approximately three weeks. Once finished, work would begin on the Gents toilets for a similar period. The disabled toilet was available for use while each of the other toilets was out of use.

ITEMS FOR REPLY

Capital Ring Sign Posts – The Clerk & Ranger reported that he had received a request from Walk London, who were responsible for maintaining the signage for the Capital Ring walk to ensure it remained navigable. They had asked for permission to install three new way-marker posts and remove one that was superfluous on Wimbledon Common. All of these locations were close to the REMPF. The Conservators approved the request.

Wimbledon Bookfest – The Clerk & Ranger reported that he had received a request from Mr Tony Kane, one of the organisers of the Wimbledon Bookfest, to erect a marquee on Rushmere from 8 to 10 October, to hold some events during the festival. The events would take the form of discussions with local authors, followed by book signings as well as events for children. The Conservators expressed some concern at the commercial nature of the event and whether it was appropriate for the Common. As Mr Kane was in the audience, the Chairman asked him to respond to the Conservators' concerns. He explained that the Bookfest was a charitable organisation and any charges made, such as for ticket sales, were to cover the costs of holding the event. The aim was only to cover costs and not to make any substantial profit. The events held in the marquee would, as much as possible, be related to natural history and local history. The planned re-launch of the Wombles books would be a very low-key event with the illustrator of the books leading a drawing workshop for children. Approximately 20 other venues were used across the Merton borough but nearly all were quite small. If a marquee was allowed, some slightly larger events would be possible. The Conservators agreed to approve the request on a trial basis for one year only, subject to any terms and conditions laid down by the Clerk & Ranger. The Clerk & Ranger also suggested that care should be taken on how the events on the Common were reported to the local press: this was agreed.

David Hartley Memorial – Mr Plastow reported that he had visited the Hartley Memorial and felt that, other than some minor brick damage, the Memorial was in relatively good condition. Some of the inscriptions were difficult to read but he was concerned that stone cleaning might erode the sharpness of the lettering and might actually make this worse. The Conservators considered the quotations proffered by Lady Djemila Cope and were generally happy for the work to go ahead, subject to Lady Cope acquiring any necessary consents from the local authority and English Heritage. It was anticipated that English Heritage would wish to satisfy themselves as to the competence of the contractors employed to carry out the work. The Conservators would require to see copies of the consents before allowing any work to commence. The Clerk & Ranger was asked to respond to Lady Cope accordingly.

04.10.6 Natural History Sub-Committee Report

a) Dr Frank reported that, due to holidays, there had not been a meeting this month.

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- b) Beverley Brook – As requested at the March meeting, the Clerk & Ranger had asked Mr Mike Jones of Gregsons to look into the legal ownership of the Beverley Brook, particularly its banks and beds. Mr Jones had confirmed that the Conservators were Riparian Owners and, as such, were presumed to own the bed of the brook up to its centre line, unless records existed to prove otherwise. He had found no records to suggest this. The Conservators queried which records Mr Jones had consulted as no mention of this was made in his report. The Clerk & Ranger was asked to follow this up with Mr Jones.

04.10.7 Putney Hospital

The Chairman reported that Mr Devons and the Clerk & Ranger had now signed the Section 106 Agreement and the Land Registry document (TP1). It was understood that the documents had not yet been signed by the WPCT nor Wandsworth Council as there had been some confusion over the plans that had been included in the Section 106. Mr Devons had noticed prior to signing that incorrect plans had been used and it had become apparent that the WPCT had previously failed to forward the most up-to-date plans to the Council. However this had been rectified prior to signing.

04.10.8 Rushmere

Mr Frampton reported that a meeting had been held on 31 March with the Wimbledon Village Safer Neighbourhood Team (i.e. local police) for an initial discussion on the possibility of introducing a Controlled Drinking Zone (CDZ) on Rushmere and the Fairground site to counter increased crime in the immediate area. Mr Devons had produced a report of the meeting for the Conservators' consideration. The CDZ would need to be created by Merton Council. However it would be enforced by the police and it would give them the discretion to confiscate alcohol. The police representatives had expressed concern that teenagers drinking on the Common became vulnerable after leaving the Common: they were increasingly being targeted by visiting groups and had sometimes been robbed of money and mobile phones. The CDZ would also give the police the power to confiscate the van loads of alcohol which (they said) had in the past been delivered to the Common in connection with the "Ball Boys party". The Conservators were invited to support the introduction of the CDZ.

Concern was expressed about a third party body (both the Council and the police) acquiring a regulatory power on the Common. Mr Devons raised two further concerns, (i) whether it would be allowable under the 1871 Act, and (ii) whether it would encourage Defra's previous suggestion that responsibility for the appointment of the three appointed Conservators be transferred to one of the three adjacent Councils. Concern was also expressed about potential unforeseen consequences of the introduction of the CDZ: in particular, it might result in the local authorities acquiring other regulatory powers over the Commons. Mr Frampton pointed out that, should the CDZ no longer be found necessary, it could be rescinded. Mr Devons also commented that the Conservators needed to be responsive to the concerns of levy payers about any escalation in local crime. After discussion, it was agreed that Gregsons should be consulted on the legality of the introduction of the CDZ on Common land in its broader legal context. Once their advice was received, a meeting should be arranged with them and that the Chairman, Mr Devons and Mr Frampton should also attend.

04.10.9 Cannizaro Road

The Clerk & Ranger reported that he had contacted Merton Council again as a reply had not been received to his letter about reducing the speed limit on Cannizaro Road to 20mph. It had emerged that the reply had gone astray during the postal strike. The Council had showed little enthusiasm for the proposal saying there was, in any case, no budget in the current financial year for the necessary costs of implementing such a scheme. It was agreed that the matter would not be pursued further for the time being.

04.10.10 Cycle Path across the Fairground Site / Rushmere area

The Clerk & Ranger reported that the Chairman had brought to his attention some problems with the cycle path that ran from the Fox & Grapes to Wimbledon Village. The recent wet weather had made the path difficult for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly the section from Cannizaro Road to the Village. The Chairman had suggested that the Clerk & Ranger look into the cost of having the path raised a few inches above the water table, to help keep it dry during the winter. The Clerk & Ranger tabled a quotation for this work of £7,700 plus VAT. He was asked to inquire whether funding would be available from the person who had originally funded the cycle track – which was now partially grassed over. The Conservators queried the use of granite dust as a suitable surface. The Clerk & Ranger was asked to speak to the contractor to discuss alternative top surfaces, such as hoggin, and report again at the May meeting. Mr Devons stressed that the new surface should be given a camber to encourage water run-off, and this was agreed.

04.10.11 2010 Commons News

The Conservators considered a draft of the Newsletter and, subject to some minor alterations, it was approved. The PA to the Clerk & Ranger explained that the Newsletter Sub-Committee would need to meet in the next couple of weeks to finalise the Newsletter before it went to print.

04.10.12 Any Other Business

May Meeting – Mrs de Coverly Veale apologised that she would not be able to attend the May meeting as she would be on holiday.

Putney Hospital – Mr Horrocks expressed the hope that the letter from Ann Radmore, the CEO of the Primary Care Trust, would be available at the next meeting. He urged that the deadline of 52 weeks for certain events under the Section 106 Agreement should be carefully diarised.

04.10.13 Date of Next Meeting

Monday 10 May 2010 at 5pm at the Information Centre.


Chairman