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**ANNUAL OPEN MEETING - Wednesday 22nd June, 7.15pm for an 8.00pm start
St Margaret's Church, Putney Park Lane SW15 5HU**

On a quiet Sunday evening in August 2015, the peace of the Commons was shattered when one of the sails on our iconic Windmill sheared, crashing through the balustrading and the roof to the first floor.

Fortunately no-one was injured. It was the day of the Prudential London Cycle Ride and the Windmill was closed, and there were very few visitors on the Commons.

Following an assessment of the damage with a specialist firm of millwrights, it was decided that the safest option was to remove the remaining three sails, and to close the Windmill to the public until the roof repair work could be completed. The Windmill re-opened in time for the Commons' Open Day on 13th September, albeit without its sails.

Heritage Lottery Support With the cost of replacing the sails and other repairs to the tower that were already in the pipeline reaching almost £140,000, the Conservators and the Trustees of the Windmill Museum, supported by many local community groups, submitted a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) under their "Our Heritage" scheme in the hope of securing funding. We were all delighted when, in March this year, the HLF confirmed that a grant of £100,000 had been made available. This will allow us to not only restore the Windmill and replace the much missed sails, but to also develop and extend a programme of activities to engage with visitors, volunteers and the local community.

Did you know?

- A windmill has stood on this site for nearly 200 years
- After it stopped working in 1864, the mill was converted into living accommodation for six families and then into a museum in 1975
- It is a Grade II* Listed structure because of its special architecture and its historic importance locally.
- Robert Baden-Powell wrote part of his book 'Scouting for Boys' in the Mill House in 1908.

Dramatic change to the Wimbledon skyline as a sail crashes through Museum roof



"The project will not only rescue this distinctive landmark, but will also encourage visitors, volunteers and the local community to explore and learn more about it."

Stuart Hopley, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London

In addition the museum's displays will be developed and a major celebration of the Windmill's bicentenary in 2017 is being planned.

Local residents have also been incredibly generous and donations approaching £8,500 have already been received. If you would like to make a donation, please contact the Ranger's Office for details.

Skylarks return to the Commons

Our staff have worked hard over the last four years to get conditions on The Plain just right to encourage Skylarks to return to the area. Despite adverse weather, dogs, and those who said it would never happen, a pair returned in 2015 and successfully bred two juveniles.

Our thanks to everyone who helped us to reach this goal, particularly to dog-walkers for keeping their dogs on-lead in the area, we really could not have done this without your support. We have had reports of Skylarks inspecting the area again this year, but it has not yet been confirmed if they are breeding; however we remain hopeful."



Wimbledon Common hosts launch of new Species Champion role for Stag Beetles

The London Wildlife Trust, in conjunction with the RSPB and the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), recently launched a new Stag Beetle initiative which saw London MEP, Seb Dance, being named as the "Species Champion" for Stag Beetles.

As a globally threatened species, Stag Beetles (*Lucanus cervus*) are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and listed as a Priority Species for the UK and London Biodiversity Action Plan. The Commons are a stronghold for Stag Beetles, indeed they are why we hold an EU "Special Area of Conservation" designation, and our staff were delighted to be able to showcase the work we do here to protect their habitat.

Mr Dance MEP commented "The EU Nature Directives have been central to the protection and preservation of biodiversity in the UK and it is vital that we protect them so that they can protect species such as the Stag Beetle, which is facing increasing risk of extinction."



The MEP Species Champion initiative has been established to highlight the threats faced by a number of key species across the British Isles. Wildlife covered by the initiative include birds, plants, mammals and insects which are of conservation concern and are currently protected under the EU's Birds and Habitats Directives.

How you can help us monitor Stag Beetles - Over the last two years we have been able to contribute to the PTES Great Stag Hunt Survey thanks to information we have received from local residents and visitors who have reported over 100 Stag Beetle sightings to us. If you see any this year, please do let our Conservation and Engagement Officer, Peter Haldane, know via e-mail peter@wpcc.org.uk or pop into the Ranger's Office.

A new face on the Commons

We'd like to introduce you to Steve Bound, our new Chief Operations Manager, who took up office in January. Steve joins us from the Malvern Hills and Commons in Worcestershire.

Steve's role here is to take care of day-to-day operations and he will oversee the Keeping, Maintenance and Playing Fields Teams, as well as property maintenance. With over 20 years experience in land management and conservation of public open spaces, Steve brings a wealth of knowledge to the Commons team and we are delighted to have him on board.



Volunteering goes from strength to strength

Last year we reported on the enormous support we'd received from local groups of volunteers who helped us with the onerous task of keeping the Commons clear of litter. This year we are delighted to report that volunteering has gone from strength to strength and has expanded into conservation work.

Last summer, Peter Haldane, our Conservation and Engagement Officer, asked for volunteers to help with clearing scrub from our heathland and you didn't let him down! Now affectionately known as the "Scrub Bashers", the group of some 15-20 volunteers have met throughout the year and helped our maintenance team with this vital heathland restoration work.

In total over the last 18 months, volunteers have provided over 1500 hours of volunteer labour – and we are grateful to every single one of them. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Peter who can provide you with more information peter@wpcc.org.uk



Why Volunteer? Here's what some of our volunteers have to say

"Being a conservation volunteer has three fantastic benefits: helping to protect rare heathland, keeping fit in an interesting way and the camaraderie of the other volunteers. It is really satisfying to see the amount of scrub we have cleared over the last year"

"As a local resident volunteering and working on the Common with others in the open air is friendly, fun, informative and healthy and easy to fit in when I am able"

"It is very rewarding to be able to help maintain this Common that is such an important feature of our neighbourhood"

New Website launched!

In December we launched our brand new website. With its clean and modern design, it's much more user-friendly.

As well as giving lots of information on the different habitats and wildlife, the new website has much more information on how visitors can enjoy the Commons and what facilities are here.

There is also a comprehensive list of events that you can join us for, and a Latest News section to keep you up to date on anything that might affect your visit to the Commons. And, if you haven't already done so, you can also sign up to our mailing list to receive copies of our regular e-Newsletters!

www.wpcc.org.uk



Staying Safe on the Commons

As the weather hopefully starts to warm up and more people visit our little piece of the countryside in London, it is worth remembering that the Commons are a natural open space that also comes with hazards.

As well as natural hazards such as trees roots and ditches, the spread of pests and diseases is having an effect on us here too. Fortunately **Ash Dieback** has not arrived here yet, but we have been affected by the **Oak Processionary Moth Caterpillar**. Not only can the caterpillar cause major defoliation of the Oaks but it can also affect people and dogs - they have irritating hairs that contain a toxin and contact with, or inhalation of, these hairs can result in skin irritation and allergic reactions. So please be careful around the Oak trees and don't let children climb in the trees, or let dogs get too close.

Dog owners and walkers need to be aware of several tick-borne diseases such as **Lyme's Disease** and **Babesiosis** that can affect dogs.

The spread of **Cutaneous and Renal Glomerular Vasculopathy**, or "**Alabama Rot**", in dogs across the UK is also of concern with several confirmed cases around Surrey/SW London. The causes of the disease, and how it is contracted, are not yet understood but we would encourage dog owners and walkers to be aware of the symptoms and, if at all concerned, to seek veterinary advice as soon as possible. Symptoms to look out for are:

- unexplained redness, sores or swellings anywhere on the body
- unexplained lesions or wounds, particularly on lower limbs but also on the chest or in the mouth.
- severe depression, loss of appetite and vomiting.

Stay Aware - Stay Safe

Open Days and BioBlitz

The last 12 months has seen us host some fantastic events from the 20th Anniversary of Stables Open Day and the second BioBlitz weekend through to a series of walks on birds, bats and moths, and a very popular walk with our Management Team in April.

2015 was the 20th Anniversary of the Open Day and we wanted to make it a special event, bigger and better than before and, with the help of visitors, stall holders and entertainers....we did just that! From displays of birds of prey and working dogs, AFC Wimbledon's 5-a-side Mascot Football match and the Wacky Dog Show to Francie the Pot-bellied pig, Amy the Sheep and ferret racing, plus a fascinating insight into the life of a WW1 soldier, it was an amazing day. This year's Open Day is on Sunday 11th September. See you there!

Building on the success of the 2014 BioBlitz, in June 2015 we held our second BioBlitz event. The BioBlitz is an opportunity for everyone to explore together, recording the wildlife of a target area of the Commons during a focal weekend of activities. Last year, with some extra help from a team of volunteers from the London Natural History Museum, 280 species were recorded during BioBlitz activities, including the endangered False Click Beetle (*Eucnemis capucina*). On our heathland, 63 bee and wasp species were found and their food sources noted giving valuable information for management. Orchids were spotted on The Plain and we saw that even weedy habitats, such as the Hogweed patch, are great places to explore insect biodiversity. The Plain hummed with insects and overhead, a special sight, skylarks soared.

Undoubtedly the highlight of the event was to see all our visitors, young and old, engaging with nature and enthusiastically discussing their species finds as well as the challenges and successes of the management practices on the Commons.



Dates for your Diary 2016

June 17th/19th & 24th/26th
Parnham's Funfair,
Rushmere

June 18th
Wimbledon Village Fair,
Rushmere

June 22nd
WPCC Annual Open Meeting, St Margaret's Church, Putney Park Lane, SW15 5HU.
7.15pm for an 8.00pm start

June 25th/26th
BioBlitz Weekend - Come and join us for a weekend of nature. See our website for more information

September 11th
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Open Day. If you are interested in having a stall at our Open Day, please contact Angela for more details angela@wpcc.org.uk

September 18th
Fungi Foray. £5 charge and booking required as places are limited. Please call 020 8788 7655 or e-mail rangersoffice@wpcc.org.uk to reserve a place.

October 19th
Autumn Walk - join our Management Team for a walk around the Commons. Free of charge but booking required.

See our website for a full list of events - wpcc.org.uk

2016 Reptile Survey

As part of this year's wildlife recording project, our Conservation & Engagement Officer, Peter Haldane, is carrying out a reptile survey. You may see some sheets of corrugated plastic on some parts of the Heath - these are "refugia" and create a warm surface which reptiles can either bask on or shelter under.

Common Lizards have been quite plentiful but other species that we might expect to see, such as Slow Worms, Grass Snakes, or even Adders, have not been spotted at all. If you do see any, please let Peter know as any information will help build up a picture of the reptile life here on the Commons. peter@wpcc.org.uk



Restoration Works at Putney Lower Common

As part of the New Development at Putney Lower Common a number of landscaping matters needed to be resolved. A public consultation was held during October last year, including a drop-in session at All Saints' Church. This enabled the local community to learn more about the restoration works planned for the Commons and the associated landscaping works.

The views of the public helped to inform the Conservators' position regarding decisions on the way forward, including the choice of restrained lighting, use and location of bollards and further planting and screening. The revised landscaping plans were approved by the Board and subsequently by the London Borough of Wandsworth Planning Committee.

To facilitate the first stage of the restoration scheme some "enabling works" to remove bramble and scrub from the former access road to the hospital from Comondale were undertaken in March 2016. Temporary Heras-type fencing has now been installed to protect the public during works to remove the former access road, metal railings and barriers.

Two new footpaths are being laid as part of the next phase of the landscaping works and clean topsoil will be imported to restore areas of the Common, which will then be seeded with wildflowers and grasses. It is anticipated that this first stage of the restoration works will be completed by August 2016.

The remaining landscaping works, including the restoration of the former car park area and the planting and screening works, will commence in the autumn of 2016.



Voltaire heads for pastures new

Our patrol horses are an integral part of the team here on the Commons and, when out on patrol, allow our Keepers to get to areas of the Commons a vehicle would have difficulty in reaching, and also allow a rapid response when needed. They are always very popular with visitors and enjoy the fuss and attention they receive.

So it was with heavy heart that we waved goodbye to Voltaire last month as he set off to spend his retirement with The Horse Trust in Buckinghamshire.

Voltaire started his working life with the Household Cavalry in Windsor. Not initially thought to be suited to the Cavalry life, one of the riding instructors took him under his wing and trained him on to show jumping at competition level. Eighteen months later, having gained some "life" experience, Voltaire was ready to take up his military duties, and took part in all the major ceremonies, including Trooping the Colour.



Some years later, the riding instructor who encouraged Voltaire in his early years joined us here on the Commons as a Mounted Keeper and, learning Voltaire was up for sale, arranged for him to come and join us.

Voltaire has given us 10 years unblemished service and has been a joy to have here and he will be much missed.

Playing Fields running at full strength

We are delighted to have welcomed Thomas's Clapham Day School to the family of clubs and organisations using the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields. Along with London Cornish RFC, Old Thorntonians FC, running clubs Thames Hare and Hounds and the Windmilers, and regular weekend football teams, the Playing Fields are now running near to capacity.

During 2015, we carried out some remedial works on several of the pitches.

The London Cornish were instrumental in helping secure funding from the RFU towards the installation of land drainage and this, together with the aeration and sand-dressing of pitches, is helping to relieve the problem of pitches flooding during wet winters. Further improvement work is planned later this year.



Logs for Sale!

Our log pile is now building up again and this is a good time to stock up on wood for next winter, or to use in your garden this summer - piles of wood make a great habitat for many invertebrates. Most of the wood comes in from local tree surgeons and all of the profits from the sale of the logs are put back into the upkeep of the Commons.

Chairman's Report



I was elected Chairman in November 2015 and would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Keith Luck, for guiding the Board through a difficult period following the most recent election. Shirley Gillbe has continued to provide invaluable support throughout as Vice-Chairman. Nicholas Evans, an elected Conservator, resigned in November and I should like to thank him for his contribution during his time on the Board.

Much of the Board's time, and the Charity's resources, since the last Annual Open Meeting have necessarily been committed to matters associated with the former Putney Hospital site. The specific issue was whether the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 had been followed at the time of granting of an easement (right of way) across part of the Charity's land for the benefit of Wandsworth Council. Difficulties within the Board resulted in the Charity Commission being invited to help to resolve the process for determining whether the Charity had suffered a loss as a result. As the Regulator they required us to adopt a Formal Action Plan which we are being guided through by a newly appointed firm of charity lawyers, Charles Russell Speechlys. A further update will be provided at the Annual Open Meeting on 22nd June.

Last year, in response to comments from some that we could improve the way in which we involve stakeholders, we pledged to try to improve channels of communication between the Conservators and our levy-payers in particular. I believe that we have made significant progress towards addressing this. Media releases are now issued after each Board meeting; a regular Commons News is being published (which I encourage more members of the public to sign up to receiving online), regular guided walks around the Commons are taking place and our volunteering programme has been very well supported. We held a General Open Meeting in early December 2015 which was well-attended and produced lively discussion on a wide range of issues affecting the Commons. Our Chief Executive, Simon Lee, has also established a Stakeholder Group which now meets regularly and this is proving a valuable forum at which specific issues can be raised through representatives of various local stakeholder groups.

Effective governance of the Charity is of paramount importance together with a future strategy for the management of the Commons. Significant focus has been placed this year on putting into place more robust procedures for identifying and managing the risks which the Charity faces. Some, such as that posed by the Oak Processionary Moth, have been highlighted elsewhere in this newsletter and the loss of a sail from our iconic windmill came as a shock to us all. I am delighted that, thanks to the work of many committed individuals, we have been successful in attracting the funding which will enable us to restore it to its full glory. We remain committed to ensuring that the public can continue to enjoy our wonderful Commons in safety and also to ensure we meet all our statutory obligations. Work is under way to develop a clear strategic direction for the charity and there will be opportunities for those who are interested to contribute to this process over the next few months.

We are extremely fortunate to have such dedicated staff managing the Commons for all our benefit. In the relatively short time I have been a Conservator, it has been a great pleasure to see at first hand the range of skills which Simon and his team bring to managing these wonderful open spaces that we treasure, not only for ourselves, but for future generations.

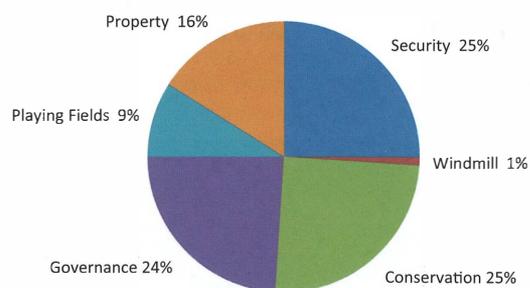
Prue Whyte, Chairman

Financial Report

In the financial year 2015/16, the total expenditure for the year amounted to £1,915,987. Following a detailed review of the condition of the Commons' assets in 2014, the Board agreed to allocate over £550,000 of ring-fenced money in its 2015/16 budget towards a programme of restoration and repair works. This has included the restoration of Springwell Cottage at a cost of over £140,000, on-going footpath repairs of £31,000, tree management arising from the planned programme of inspections of £27,500, works at the REMPF of £15,000, including operations to try and help relieve poor drainage on some sports pitches, and over £55,000 on planned preventative maintenance works to both residential and commercial properties. The remaining ring-fenced money has been included within the 2016/17 budget to continue the on-going restoration and repair operations.

Governance costs have increased, largely as a result of the ongoing legal issues associated with the Putney Hospital Easement.

Mindful of the on-going need to optimise the use of our resources, but recognising the requirement to commit investment in the Commons buildings and infrastructure, the Conservators increased the Levy by approximately £25,000 (2.5%) for 2016/17, still some 5% below that which it could legally have set the Levy. However, as a result of a further increase in the overall number of residential properties in the Levy-paying area during 2015, the actual increase in the Levy to individual properties has been marginal.



These figures are unaudited and subject to change

Gifts and Legacies

As a registered Charity, donations and legacies are always welcome. Whether it is a specific donation for a one-off project, such as the Windmill, or for general conservation of the Commons, every penny raised is used to directly conserve and protect the Commons for future generations to enjoy. Please contact the Ranger's Office for further information.