

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators  
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Chief Executive: Simon Lee



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators**

#### **February 2017 Update**

##### **Charity Commission's Formal Action Plan**

Following receipt by the Board of a Retrospective Valuation Report, the Trustees sought and fully considered independent legal advice on its implications, as required by the Charity Commission's Formal Action Plan dated 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015.

At their scheduled meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017, the Board concluded that, in their view, the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC) had now completed the implementation of the Formal Action Plan.

The Board has advised the Charity Commission of this outcome and await a response.

##### **Charity Commission's Statutory Inquiry**

The Board continues to cooperate with the Charity Commission on this matter and has requested guidance from the Commission on the timescale, process and next steps in the Inquiry.

The Board awaits that further guidance but continues to manage all aspects of the Charity in the meantime.

It is therefore inappropriate for WPCC to comment in detail on matters connected with the Statutory Inquiry, including those arising out of the implementation of the Formal Action Plan, at this time. The Board's view is that a public meeting will be held as soon as it is possible to speak fully about the work that has been undertaken.

##### **Ministerial Appointment Process by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Defence**

The Board of WPCC is composed of five elected and three Appointed Conservators as required under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871. The Secretaries of State for Defence, the Home Office and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs are responsible for appointing the three Appointed Conservator positions to the Board.

At its meeting on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017, the Board approved a process, based on current best practice guidelines, to select suitable candidates to recommend for appointment as a Conservator to replace Sir Ian Andrews, the current Ministry of Defence Appointed Conservator, who comes to the end of his tenure after eight years' service.

Although WPCC is not formally a public body, the appointment process, as far as possible, follows the process set out in the Government's "Better Public Appointments" guidance, and will be similar to that followed in recent years for the other two Appointed Conservators. A shortlist of candidates will be recommended to the Secretary of State for Defence to make a final decision on the appointment.

This is a special opportunity to play a key part in shaping the future of the Commons and Heath that cover some 1140 acres of publicly accessible land in south west London. For more information on this vacancy visit and to download a Candidate Brief and Application Pack visit:

<http://www.wpcc.org.uk/about-us/vacancy>

Applications are welcomed from interested individuals with relevant experience. More information and hard copies of the Pack can also be obtained from the Ranger's Office tel. 020 8788 7655. The Closing Date for applications is the **10<sup>th</sup> March 2017**.

### **New Development at Putney Lower Common**

Landscaping works to restore parts of Putney Lower Common following completion of the school and new apartments have been finalised for this planting season. Temporary chestnut pale fencing has been installed around the newly seeded meadows and planted areas to protect them while they establish.

Constructive discussions have also taken place between OASIS Academy, the developer (Durkan), local residents and WPCC regarding light pollution affecting wildlife habitats, particularly in the woodland belt immediately to west of the new school.

### **Levy**

Income for the up-keep of the 1,140 acres of the Commons comes principally from a Levy raised on residential properties within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of Wimbledon Common or within the old Parish of Putney ["the levying area"]. The Levy is set annually by the Conservators and is then apportioned between the three relevant Councils: Wandsworth, Merton and Kingston. The Levy then appears as a separate precept on the annual council tax statements sent to those properties.

Any increase in the Levy is based on a calculation set out in Regulations from 1990, introduced when the responsibility for collecting the Levy was transferred from WPCC to the three relevant Councils. However, any annual Levy increase is subject to a cap principally limited to the increase in RPI in the years preceding the Levy.

Following careful consideration, the Board decided for the first time in five years to set the Levy at its maximum level of £1,135,935 for 2017/18. The average 'D-band' Council Tax cost per property is £28.58 per annum, (or 55 pence per week), an average increase of £1.61 compared to the charge in 2016/17.

### **Transport for London**

Transport for London (TfL) has applied for permission from WPCC to install a large cabinet and pillar for an electric bus charging point on Common land at Putney Heath near to the Green Man.

The Conservators, mindful of their duties under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 to 'preserve as far as maybe the natural aspect and condition of the Commons', are obliged to consider the overall impact of any proposals they receive for use of the Commons, and the potential effect on the Commons as a whole.

It is hoped that TfL and the Conservators will be able to agree a solution that facilitates reductions in air pollution whilst preventing any further urbanisation to the area of Common land forming part of the bus station on Putney Heath.

### **Wildlife and Conservation Forum**

On the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> February 2017, WPCC's Wildlife and Conservation Forum held another highly successful Winter Talk, this year on hedgehogs.

Around eighty people attended the London Scottish Golf Club and were given a fascinating insight by expert Dr Nigel Reeve (Wildlife Biologist) into the daily lives of these endangered, but iconic, small mammals.

Dr Reeve has agreed to provide additional training for WPCC staff so that work practices, particularly on Putney Lower Common where hedgehogs have recently been seen, conserve and enhance the habitats that hedgehogs require.

A baseline vegetation survey of the whole of the Commons has recently been completed. The survey, undertaken by one of the country's leading ecology consultancies (Penny Anderson Associates), has revealed that the work of the Commons staff and our volunteers is having a very positive impact, particularly in terms of restoring the Commons woodlands and heathlands.

Areas of concern were also identified. Specifically, our wet heaths, particularly rare habitats for wildlife and plants and a key reason for the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status of much of the Commons, are drying out.

This survey will form the basis on which to prepare a new land management plan, ensuring that the Commons habitats are retained and, wherever possible, enhanced.

In both pieces of work, the Conservators noted the leadership of Dr Ros Taylor, DEFRA Appointed Conservator and the support of Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer.

### **Stakeholder Group**

In order to develop, for the first time, a longer term strategic plan for the Commons, the Board has enlisted the support of the recently established Stakeholder Group. This dedicated team of representative users and interest groups has developed a draft strategy document that will be presented to the Board shortly.

Whilst recognising the importance of day to day activities by staff and volunteers, the strategy focuses on the long-term goals of conserving and safeguarding the special qualities of the Commons. It will enable the Board to look at ways of managing financial and natural resources more efficiently, particularly given the competing demands on the charity's limited finances.

It is envisaged that the Board will commence a consultation with local residents during the summer with final approval of the strategy later this year.

### **Newsletter and website**

Commons News, a regular newsletter updating the public on developments in the management of the flora and fauna of this unique area of common land is published on the WPCC website which also includes readily accessible information about the Commons.

Copies can be found at: <http://www.wpcc.org.uk/latest-news/news>

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NOTES for Editors - Wimbledon and Putney Commons is a charity managed by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators. It was established under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871. The Commons comprise some 1,140 acres across Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common.

The Conservators (Trustees) were formally notified by the Charity Commission on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016 that it had opened a Statutory Inquiry. See [www.gov.uk/government/news/new-charity-investigation-Wimbledon-and-Putney-Commons-conservators](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-charity-investigation-Wimbledon-and-Putney-Commons-conservators) for further details.

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