



CONSERVATORS' CONFIDENTIAL MEETING
to be held on
Monday 12 February 2024 at 4.30pm
in the Information Centre, Manor Cottage
London SW19 5NR

AGENDA

PART A(2) CONFIDENTIAL

In accordance with the Resolution from the Board meeting held on 12 July 2021, this part of the meeting is considered confidential and therefore closed to members of the public.

02.24.14 **Declarations of Interest**

02.24.15 **WPCB Board Meetings**

- i. Minutes of the Board meeting held on 4 December 2023
- ii. Resolutions of the Part A2 Board Meeting held on 11 December 2023
- iii. Minutes of the Part A2 Board Meeting held on 11 December 2023

02.24.16 **Matters Arising**

02.24.17 **Chief Executive's Report – Confidential**

02.24.18 **Levy Rebasing**

02.24.19 **Constitutional Matters**

02.24.20 **Licences and Leases**

- a) Camp Road
- b) Other Licence and Lease Matters

02.24.21 **Financial**

- Management Reports and Accounts:
- i. November 2023
 - ii. December 2023

02.24.22 **VAT Update**

02.24.23 **2024 Conservators Election**

02.24.24 **Top Ten Risks**

02.24.25 **Committee and Forums Draft Minutes/Notes**

To receive minutes/notes of the:

- i. FIC meeting held on 23 January 2024
- ii. Wildlife and Conservation on 9 January 2024
- iii. ARC Meeting held on 17 October 2023

It is proposed that the meeting be adjourned at this point and reconvened on 19 February 2024 at 2.30pm.

02.24.25 **Appointment of Conservators**

- 02.24.26 Rural Payments Agency**
- 02.24.27 Business Plan and Budget**
- 02.24.28 Fundraising Update**
- 02.24.29 Land Management Plan**
- 02.24.30 Items for Inclusion in a Media Release by the Board**
- 02.24.31 Items for Future Consideration**

**Draft Public Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on
Monday 11 December 2023 at 4.30pm at the Information Centre, Manor Cottage,
London SW19 5NR**

Conservators: Mrs Diane Neil Mills, Chairman (DNM)
Mr Nigel Ware (NW)
Mr Oliver Bennett (OB)
Mrs Sue Bucknall (SB)
Mr Peter Hirsch (PDH)
Mr Michael Johnston (MJ)
Mr Peter Shortt (PS)

Officers: Colin Cooper, Chief Executive (CE)
Angela Evans-Hill, Executive Assistant to Chief Executive and
Communications Officer (EA to CE/CO)
Philip Warner, Management Accountant (MA)

Members of the public: Two members of the public attended.

The Board expressed their condolences to the family of the member of the public who sadly took their own life on the Commons at the weekend and their thoughts remained with everyone who had been involved.

PART A(1) PUBLIC

12.23.1 Confirmation of Attendance and Apologies for Absence

Apologies: Mr David Hince, Conservator
Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk and Ranger (DCR)
Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer (C&EO)
Maggie May, Fundraising Manager (FM)

12.23.2 Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests in Respect of Items to be Considered in this Part of the Meeting

DNM confirmed she was a member of the Thames Hare and Hounds. The Board agreed that this did not preclude DNM from any discussions at the meeting.

12.23.3 WPCC Board Meetings

The Resolutions and the Minutes of the Minutes of the Part A(1) Board Meeting of 9 October 2023 were approved.

12.23.4 Matters Arising

Media Release on the 2022 Annual Monitoring Report – The EA to CE/CO advised that the Media Release in respect of the monitoring report had now been circulated.

The Crooked Billet – The deckchairs had now been put away for the winter but the matter of notices on the chairs advising the chairs were available for anyone to use was still outstanding. It was suggested that they be reminded so that this could possibly be done over winter.

Action: DCR

Open Day – The income/expenditure for the Open Day would follow.

Action: DCR

12.23.5 Committee Matters

There were no committee matters to report.

12.23.6 Chief Executive's Report

The Board received and noted the CE's report.

Keepers - The Keepers had a busy period with a member of the team on long-term sick leave. They had been working extra shifts to maintain a presence on the Common every day.

The usual incidents have been dealt with, the top three being:

- Cyclists - mainly off tracks and a couple with excess speed;
- Dogs - groups meeting up causing more than four dogs being together;
- Golf - not wearing correct attire.

Horses – The Keepers had heard from Hillside Animal Sanctuary who advised that Hector had settled well into retirement. The new horse Bold Conduct had settled in well.

Winter routine was currently in operation with the car park opening time changing to 7am.

Maintenance – The Maintenance Team's planned heathland/acid grassland restorations works had started at the beginning of October 2023 with tree felling, woodland thinning and scrub clearance work being completed along the golf course fairway Caesar's Camp, amongst sections of heathland along Ladies Mile, a continuation of works in extending the Tibbets Corner Meadow heathland site, and the ongoing work to the large areas of heathland and woodland pasture amongst the grasslands between Memorial Ride, Green Ride and Centre Path. Felled timber from these projects would be used to create habitat piles or stockpiled for future use.

REMPF – A new member of full-time staff had been recruited and had started work in September 2023. The team was busy with weekend sports matches and the schools during the week.

Independent Green Space Managers Network - Following an invitation from Parks for London, who chair and provide the secretariat function, the CE had started to participate in this informal network of pan-London non-local authority green space owners and managers. The network aims to share experiences, innovation and good practice.

Wandsworth Sustainability Partnership – The CE was invited to participate in this informal network of local organisations, people, as well as, officers and members from the Council. The meeting included a talk about the findings of a study done by the Grantham Institute 'How do UK citizens perceive the co-benefits of climate action?'. This was followed by some breakout sessions to discuss sustainability matters people were working on.

The next meeting in February 2024 would be face-to-face in Battersea on 'Nature, Biodiversity and Conservation', which promises to be very interesting.

Events and Visits

Levy Consultation Public Meetings – The CE thanked all staff who had attended the three in-person and one online consultation events, with several attending when they were off duty. He asked to put on record his thanks to them for their commitment in attending these out-of-hours but important events. The Chairman also reiterated her thanks to everyone involved in the meetings.

Base Youth Centre Roehampton Visit (25th Oct) – The CE hosted a visit from Base Youth Club, based in Roehampton. They were given a tour of our stable yard, shown how to groom horses and the role of the Keeper and then helped the C&EO clear encroachment of trees on to the heathland at Putney Heath. A visit to the Windmill Museum then followed, where the teens learned about the history of the windmill. None of the children had visited the Commons before.

Wild Collect – The CE led a walk for Wild Collect, a student group from the University of Roehampton who had an interest in nature.

The EA to the CE had also recently established contact with ARK Putney Academy (off Putney Heath), which was an action following our meeting the Putney Society, and it was hoped that they would come for a similar visit.

Both these visits furthered engagement with the Roehampton Community.

Halloween Pumpkin Hunt – The Pumpkin Hunt held on 28 October 2023 was a huge success and very popular with visitors. Around 250 children took part.

Carols at the Windmill – The event took place on Saturday 9 December 2023 at the Windmill, jointly organised by WPCC and the Windmill Museum Trustees. The evening raised some £1,700 (gross). The Chairman commented it was a very successful evening that generated a lot of goodwill. SB thanked volunteers from the Friends who helped raise donations.

It was noted that a new film was being released about the Wombles and this might generate additional interest in the Commons.

12.23.7 Fundraising Update

The Board received and noted the Fundraising Manager's report.

Significant Donations - In October 2023, WPCC was presented with a cheque for £750 from the Wimbledon Windmilers, a regular sports group.

Robert Holmes & Co have continued their support of the Commons and pledged to make a donation of £2,180 to help plant the hedgerow in the Wildlife Garden and support woodland management activities as part of their tree funding programme.

In November 2023, a regular 'Healthy Walk' attendee gave WPCC a donation of £1,000 as a way to say thank you for 'opening their eyes to the Common'. The thank you card said, 'It has been great getting to know the Commons in all the seasons and to learn about the maintenance that is done to keep it looking natural'.

Reception for Benefactors - A Festive Drinks Reception had been organised for 12 December 2023, but had been postponed to the New Year due to illness.

Contactless Payment Devices - Two more contactless payment devices had been purchased to help the staff and volunteers take donations at events.

12.23.8 Conservation Update

The Board received and noted the Conservation and Engagement Officer's conservation report. The CE highlighted the following points:

A lot of work had been carried out on the heathland over recent months, with a focus on the clearance of invasive trees to the immediate south of Tibbet's Underpass, opening up a new area of heathland. This had been carried out by staff and volunteers.

In addition to the heathland work that has been carried out near Tibbet's Meadow, another area of heathland where invasive trees have recently been cut back is located close to the junction of Ladies Mile and Inner Park Ride. While the work in this area only covered a relatively small area of heathland, there is a good coverage of heather remaining on this site which should benefit from increased levels of light and the reduction of invasive vegetation.

Clearance work had been taking place on the golf course, particularly around the Caesar's Camp fairway. This involved the coppicing of mainly silver birch trees and gorse and will help with the recovery of acid grassland in this area.

Healthy Walks continued on a three-weekly basis.

Holly clearance work had now started as part of the woodland clearance. The area being focused on this year was between the golf course and Queensmere. There was a potential for public comment given the decision to burn the holly arisings. The work should be completed late January/early February.

12.23.9 Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons Report

SB reported on the Friends recent activities.

Current membership was as follows:

Benefactors – 55
Household – 347
Individuals – 231

An opportunity to purchase membership to the Friends as a gift had been set up and marketed. One had currently been sold.

Membership fees alone had raised over £100,000 since inception in September 2019.

The C&EO had led a walk on 19 October 2023 around the woodland to explain the management of the woodland. He had led a second walk on 16 November 2023 at Putney Lower Common. He would lead a further walk in spring 2024.

The Friends and the CE helped with the Walk and Talk walks. Conservator PDH had led a walk on Wimbledon at War on Remembrance weekend.

A walk was being held on 13 December 2023 for Friends and donors who had contributed to the path appeal. The CE commented that the new paths had received a lot of positive feedback, particularly from local users with mobility issues.

12.23.10 2024 Calendar of Meetings

The Board received and noted the calendar of meetings and events for 2024. It was suggested that there was an opportunity for Conservators who were thinking of re-standing in the forthcoming election to attend other Committee meetings in January and February 2024 to get a sense of their work.

12.23.11 WPCF Forum/Group Meetings

The minutes of the Wildlife and Conservation Forum held on 24 October 2023 were received.

12.23.12 Public Questions on Matters Considered in Part A(1) of this Meeting

Green Ride – It was noted that the path had only been restored from Inner Windmill Road to Memorial Ride. The CE explained that there had been insufficient funds to complete the whole path but this would be done in the future. Funds had been received from South West Trains as part of their sustainability work.

(Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators Meeting	12 February 2024	02.24.4
Subject: Matters Arising from the Public Board meeting of 11 December 2023	Private	
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons	For Information	
Matters Arising		

Crooked Billet - No alternative to a rope [to demarcate the area where benches were permitted] had been agreed but, at the moment, did not appear to be necessary. The only issue not yet resolved was the matter of a note on each chair advising that the chairs, and the pub's toilets, were available for anyone to use.

Update – This will be followed up when the deckchairs come back into use

Open Day 2023

The 2023 Open Day income/expenditure was provided in the confidential part of the meeting.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	12 February 2024	02.24.6
Subject: Levy for 2024/25	Public	
Report of: Chairman of the Conservators	For Decision	

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Summary

The Wimbledon and Putney Commons (Special Levies) Regulations 1990 (the '1990 Regulations'), as amended, establishes a formula that determines the maximum levy that WPCC may issue each financial year based on a fixed quantum in 1990, increased each year by the Retail Prices Index (RPI). Under the legislation, each financial year, the Conservators have the power to issue a levy at the level deemed necessary to fulfil their statutory duties provided it does not exceed this maximum level.

This paper sets out the RPI figure for September 2023 of 8.8608% and the impact that it has on the maximum total levy to be set for the 2024/25 financial year. The paper also confirms the Council Tax Base (CTB) for the 2024/25 financial year of 41,447 Band D equivalent properties, representing a marginal decrease from 41,449 in 2023/24. On this basis, the maximum per household levy that would be permitted under the 1990 Regulations for the 2024/25 financial year would be £39.15 per year per Band D property, representing an increase of 8.9% from 2023/24.

The paper also sets out details of the impact of the discounts, exemptions and benefits to which levy-payers are entitled. It is noted that the share of the total physical properties that such discounts, exemptions and benefits comprise remains unchanged from the previous year at 17%, ranging from 36% for Band A properties to 4% for Band H properties.

The paper also notes the Board's decision of 4 December 2023 to continue to pursue an increase in the maximum level of the levy in line with the proposal in the formal consultation that was conducted during 2023, noting that the Secretary of State is responsible for any amendment to the 1990 Regulations.

DRAFT RESOLUTION

In consideration of:

- a. the Conservators' duty under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 ('the 1871 Act') to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise;
- b. the Conservators' duties as trustees of the charity to act only in the best interests of the charity and to safeguard the charity's assets;
- c. the inherent responsibility therefore of the Conservators to care for both the natural and built environments, to ensure that the landscape and buildings are properly maintained and visitors are able to access the Commons and to do so safely;

- d. the current condition assessment by Natural England of WPCC's SSSI habitats of unfavourable/recovering, which recognises that the necessary management measures are in place but that additional resources are required to restore WPCC's unique habitats;
- e. the policy agreed by the Board at its meeting on 14 December 2020 to set WPCC's levy at the maximum sum available for a further five year period from 2022/23 to 2026/27 and having noted:
 - (i) the increases experienced in WPCC's expenses as a result of continued high visitor numbers to the Commons, the impact of inflation on WPCC's costs and the impact of such increases on WPCC's operational budget; and
 - (ii) the potential impact of any increase in WPCC's levy on levy-payers, particularly those most in need and the protection afforded by the benefits reduction and exemption schemes operated by the three local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC (ie, Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth) for the purposes of both council tax and WPCC's levy;
- f. WPCC's powers under the 1990 Regulations to issue a 'special levy' for the purpose of providing for the items of expenditure set out in the 1990 Regulations and the responsibility of the Conservators to use best endeavours to issue the 'special levy' with respect to a financial year before 15 February in the year preceding the financial year;
- g. the high level of support amongst levy-paying households for an increase in the levy that was indicated in the recent formal consultation and the Board's decision of 4 December 2023 to continue to pursue a levy increase in line with the proposal in the consultation document noting that the Secretary of State is responsible for any amendment to the 1990 Regulations;

The Board RESOLVES to:

- (i) set the aggregate levy for the financial year 2024/25 at £1,622,642, the maximum allowed under the 1990 Regulations, representing an increase of 8.8608% from 2023/24 and potentially generating an additional £132,076 to support the work of the charity;
- (ii) note that in accordance with the 1990 Regulations, each of the three local authorities have notified WPCC of their respective Council Tax Bases (CTB) for the 2024/25 financial year; the total CTB for the levy area totalling 41,447 and representing a marginal increase of less than 0.01% from 2023/24;
- (iii) note that on the basis of the proposed increase in the aggregate levy and the CTB as reported by the three local authorities, the per household levy for a Band D property for the 2024/25 financial year would be £39.15 per year, representing an increase of 8.9% from 2023/24;
- (iv) note that over the same time period, the number of physical properties in the levy area has increased from 41,670 (2023/24) to 41,826 (2024/25), representing an increase of 0.4%;
- (v) note that the discounts, exemptions and benefits to which levy-payers are entitled remains largely unchanged from 2023/24 as a share of the total number of physical properties of 17%, ranging from 36% for Band A properties to 4% for Band H properties;

- (vi) note WPCC's responsibility under the 1990 Regulations to use best endeavours to notify the three local authorities of WPCC's levy before 15 February in the year preceding the financial year;
- (vii) note that WPCC's 'special levy' is included in the quantum subject to the ceiling under the Localism Act 2011 and that the local authorities do therefore need to take into consideration WPCC's levy in the setting of their council tax given the requirement to hold a referendum if the total increase were to increase beyond the ceiling set by DLUHC.

Recommended Levy Increase for the 2024/25 Financial Year

The Wimbledon and Putney Commons (Special Levies) Regulations 1990 (the '1990 Regulations'), as amended, establishes a formula that determines the maximum levy that WPCC may issue each financial year based on a fixed quantum in 1990, increased each year by the Retail Prices Index (RPI). Under the legislation, each financial year, the Conservators have the power to issue a levy at the level deemed necessary to fulfil their statutory duties provided it does not exceed this maximum level.

At the Board meeting held on 14 December 2020, the Board resolved the following:

Given the continued pressure on operational budgets, the policy of setting the levy at the maximum sum available, will continue for a further five-year period 2022/23 to 2026/27, to be reviewed if changes to the levy base are secured.

The RPI figure for the year to September 2022 is 8.8608%. This increases the maximum levy from £1,490,566 in 2023/24 to £1,622,642 in 2024/25, potentially generating an additional £132,076 to support the work of the charity.

Despite the decision by the Board in December 2020 to set the levy at the maximum level permitted for the following five year period, given the significant increase in RPI and the potential impact therefore on levy-payers, Conservators are asked to review the proposed increase in the levy for the financial year 2024/25 with consideration of the following factors:

- (i) the current rise in the cost of living and the impact on residents, particularly those who are struggling financially, and the concern shown by the leaders of both LB Merton and LB Wandsworth as well as the MP for Putney of the impact of any increase in WPCC's levy on residents;
- (ii) the protection afforded by the benefits and reduction schemes operated by the three local authorities that collect the levy on behalf of WPCC (ie, Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth) for the purposes of both council tax and WPCC's levy;
- (iii) the Conservators' duty under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 ('the 1871 Act') to protect and preserve the Commons for the purposes of recreation and exercise;
- (iv) the Conservators' duties as trustees of the charity to act only in the best interests of the charity and to safeguard the charity's assets;
- (v) the responsibility therefore of the Conservators to care for both the natural and built environments to ensure that the landscape and buildings are properly maintained

- and protected from irreversible decline and visitors are able to access the Commons without fear;
- (vi) the current condition assessment of WPCC's SSSI sites of unfavourable/recovering, which recognises that the necessary management measures are in place but that additional resources are required to restore WPCC's unique habitats;
 - (vii) the forecast budget deficit in 2023/24 and the expectation that there will be a further budget deficit in 2024/25 despite a recognition that continuing budget deficits are not sustainable;
 - (viii) WPCC's responsibilities as an employer and the impact that inflation is having on our staff;
 - (ix) the high level of support amongst levy-paying households for an increase in the levy that was indicated in the recent formal consultation and the Board's decision of 4 December 2023 to continue to pursue a levy increase in line with the proposal in the consultation document noting that the Secretary of State is responsible for any amendment to the 1990 Regulations.

Given the considerations noted above, it is recommended that it would be neither prudent nor in the best interests of the charity to propose an increase in the levy that was below the maximum permitted under the 1990 Regulations.

Under the 1990 Regulations, each of the three local authorities 'shall inform' WPCC of their Council Tax Base (CTB) by 7 February of the year preceding the relevant financial year. In accordance with this statutory duty, each of the three local authorities has notified WPCC of their Council Tax Base (CTB) for the 2024/25 financial year, totalling 41,447 and representing a marginal decrease from 2023/24 (less than 0.01%), as set out below:

Band D Equivalent Dwellings (2024/25)				
	Levy Area		Entire Local Authority	
Kingston	1,728	4%	65,500	3%
Merton	11,782	28%	78,678	15%
Wandsworth	27,937	67%	143,513	19%
Total	41,447	100%	287,692	

Band D Equivalent Dwellings (2023/24)				
	Levy Area		Entire Local Authority	
Kingston	1,590	4%	64,569	2%
Merton	11,761	28%	77,694	15%
Wandsworth	28,098	68%	141,015	20%
Total	41,449	100%	283,278	

Note: Percentage figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

It is important to note that the discounts, exemptions and benefits to which levy-payers are entitled remains largely unchanged from 2023/24 as a share of the total number of physical properties of 17%, ranging from 36% for Band A properties to 4% for Band H properties.

Despite the marginal decrease in the number of Band D equivalent properties, the number of physical properties in the levy area has increased from 41,670 (2023/24) to 41,826 (2024/25), representing an increase of 0.4%.

On the basis of the proposed recommendation to increase the aggregate levy to the maximum permitted and the CTB figures set out above, the per household levy for a Band D property for the 2024/25 financial year would be £39.15, representing an increase of 8.9% from 2023/24.

Under the 1990 Regulations, WPCCC must use best endeavours to notify the three local councils (Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth) of the proposed levy before 15 February in the preceding financial year. If the Board were to decide that due to the high increase in RPI or any other reason, to reconsider the resolution taken on 14 December 2020, to allow the increase in the levy to be set below the maximum permitted, such decision would be subject to section 44 of the Commissioners Clauses Act 1847, which is as follows:

44. No resolution of commissioners to be revoked at a subsequent meeting unless under certain circumstances.

No resolution at any meeting of the commissioners shall be revoked or altered at any subsequent meeting, unless notice of the intention to propose such revocation or alteration be given by the clerk to each of the commissioners seven days at least before holding the meeting, nor unless such revocation or alteration be determined upon by majority consisting of two-thirds of the commissioners present at such subsequent meeting, if the number of commissioners present at such subsequent meeting be not greater than the number present when such resolution was come to, or by a majority, if the number of commissioners present at such subsequent meeting be greater than the number present at such former meeting.

On this basis, the latest date by which notice could be given to revoke or alter the resolution of 14 December 2020 would be 7 February 2024.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	12 February 2024	02.24.7
Subject: Chief Executive Report	Public Yes	
Report of: Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons	For Decision and Information	
<h1>SUMMARY</h1>		
Recommendations:		
The Board receives and notes the report		

Keepers Update

WPCC's Head Keeper, Richard Thompson, retired on 31st January after nearly ten years service on the Commons. Richard will still be living in the area and will remain a frequent user of the Commons. We all wish him a long and happy retirement. We are currently advertising for a replacement Keeper to bring the team back up to full strength.

This means the Keepers are a man down and, with the Head Ranger at Putney Lower Common on long-term jury service, they have also been carrying out additional patrols on Putney Lower Common.

The main issues they have been dealing with relate to dogs, cycling and golfing incidents.

The Keepers also helped with the set up and take down for the Carol service at the Windmill in December.

The new horse, Bold Conduct, has settled in well to the routine in the stables and is proving to be an excellent patrol horse. All the horses received their annual dental inspection on 5 February.

The wet weather has also brought on issues for the horses with a condition called mud fever. This usually affects their heels and causes cracking of the skin. The vet has provided a suitable treatment and all are healed.



Maintenance Update

The main projects that the maintenance team have been involved in since the Christmas/New Year period have revolved around the ride thinning and woodland restoration works along sections of Warren Farm Ride. This work involves the felling on non-native trees, along with the coppicing of other trees to allow light into these areas. This will allow the creation of a balanced and tiered age range of trees and vegetation along these woodland edges.

The felled timber is used to create wood piles and stag beetle habitat, and some is buried to promote subterranean deadwood habitats. Other selected trees are left as standing monoliths. Standing deadwood is prioritised wherever it is safe to do so.

With a number of named storms and weather warnings being issued recently, staff have been busy carrying out post storm tree inspections and clearing up any damaged trees. This is in addition to the ongoing commitment to regular tree safety works across the site, which have included works to high use paths and horse rides, main road edges and residential boundaries.

Other works include bramble and understory vegetation control, via tree lifting and mowing works, on sections of encroaching woodland and scrub along the golf course fairways, ride edges, high use paths and areas of woodland glades across Putney Heath, the Brickfield site and the Causeway areas.

Regular maintenance work around waste management, upkeep of ditches and culverts after heavy rain and storms, resurfacing and pothole repairs to various roads and carparks and managing cover of the regular and extensive maintenance and patrol needs of Putney Lower Common whilst Bill Rowland is absent.

Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields Update

The usual pitch preparation for both the schools that use the facilities Monday to Friday and the contracted teams that use the facilities on weekends. This includes cutting, slitting, marking out, filling holes and repairing any damaged goals.

The Playing Fields suffered as a result of the recent storms with all the pitches saturated and many had large areas of standing water. The groundsmen spent a lot of time pumping the water off the pitches but as a result of all this effort, a full weekend of fixtures was able to be held the following weekend - one of a very few grounds in the area that were able to host matches.

As well as the football and rugby, the Playing Fields have also held a number of runs. Thames Hare and Hounds (TH&H) hosted the Surrey League event, 6 races with approximately 700 runners. TH&H also had their 2nd Sunday of the month run, and the Dash for the Splash (with approximately 250 runners).

Thomas Schools held their Interschools Cross Country, yet another successful event at the playing fields

We have had a few water leaks around the building, fortunately none from the roof, all of which were quite minor and repaired to prevent further damage.

Community Engagement

With Christmas and the New Year holidays, the number of events and engagements being held has been minimal. The following is a brief update.

Winter Talk 2024 – A very successful Winter Talk was held on Tuesday 6 February 2024. Guest speaker was Dr Mark Spencer, an internationally respected botanist. Dr Spencer has been involved in an assessment of the status of London's flora and gave an overview of the results of that survey, highlighting many of the species that have been lost or are facing the threat of extinction. His talk also highlighted the importance of the both the Commons and Richmond Park as a haven for many of these threatened species.

Our Roehampton – The EA to CE/CO is now regularly attending meetings of the Our Roehampton organisation and also the Roehampton Women's Network. The latter are keen to have her speak at one of their coffee morning meetings about the history of the Commons, and she is working with them to arrange a walk starting at the Alton Estate. An article will also be provided for the Roehampton Voice newsletter.

Wimbledon Society Newsletter – An article is being prepared for the next Wimbledon Society Newsletter which will provide an update on the results of the levy Consultation and a general update on the conservation work on the Commons. The Society are including their own article on various elections taking place, including WPCC's, so our article will refer back to that rather than repeating the information.

Easter Egg Hunt – The Commons' annual Easter Egg Hunt will take place on Friday 29 March 2024 from 10.30am to 3.30pm.

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	12 February 2024	02.24.8
Subject: Fundraising Update	Public	
Report of: Fundraising Manager	For Information	
Summary		
This report provides a summary of fundraising activity in December 2023 and January 2024.		

Putney Lower Common projects

In 2022, WPCC launched two fundraising appeals to repair the green footbridge and to plant an orchard on Putney Lower Common and it was stated that any additional donations would be restricted to projects that would improve Putney Lower Common. WPCC is incredibly grateful for all the donations received are now delivering improvements to the site to enhance access and manage conservation. New wildflower bulbs have been planted and wildflower seed will be sown to improve grassland diversity and habitat for pollinators. New bird boxes will soon be installed in the woodlands ahead of bird nesting season.

Additional plans over the coming year include improving paths, installing trail cameras to monitor wildlife, removal of invasive non-native species including Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). We are incredibly grateful to the local community and everyone who made has made a donation.

Wimbledon High Fundraising

Wimbledon High Girls Schools have chosen to fundraise for WPCC this year. Proceeds from their 'Enterprise' fair will be donated to the charity. Following a presentation at the school by the fundraising manager of various projects that they could help fund, pupils chose to fundraise for a new defibrillator. Staff look forward to attending the Enterprise Fair in March.

Reception for Benefactors

WPCC is fortunate to be supported by over 500 Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons. To show our appreciation of our Benefactors and thank them for their generosity, a Spring Drinks Reception is organised for 14th March, and we look forward to having the opportunity to thank our generous supporters.

General donations (December – January)

£2,731 has been received in general donations thanks to donations made during the carols event in December, book donations and donations made via the car park machine and website (not including Friends subscriptions).

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Board of Conservators	February 2024	02.24.9
Subject:	Public	
Report of: Conservation and Engagement Officer	For Information	
<p>This report provides an update on the conservation work taking place on the Commons.</p> <p>The Board are asked to receive the report.</p>		

Heathland Management

Lowland heathland is an internationally important landscape which is listed as a priority habitat for conservation in the UK Biodiversity Plan. As a result of the lowland heath and other associated habitats that can be found on the Commons since 1953, approximately 80% of the Commons have been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In 2005, this area was also designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

One of the ongoing threats to the Commons' heathland is through scrub and tree encroachment which, if left unmanaged, would result in the loss of heathland vegetation and the loss of the wildlife that depends on these areas for their ongoing survival.

Although invasive scrub is tackled by various groups of volunteers throughout the year, during October, November and December 2023, larger trees have been thinned in four areas of the Commons heathland.

These areas have included:

- Heathland near Tibbet's Corner. (Putney Heath)
- Heathland near Kingsmere. (Putney Heath)
- Heathland near to the junction of Ladies Mile and Inner Park Ride (Putney Heath)
- Heathland south of Hookhamslade Pond (Wimbledon Common).



Heathland tree thinning on Putney Heath (2023).



Heathland tree thinning on Wimbledon Common 2023.



Heathland work in progress near Tibbet's Corner (November 2023)

Woodland Management

Woodland is the largest habitat type on Wimbledon and Putney Commons, covering approximately 290 hectares. According to the most recent Natural England condition assessment, the woodland habitats are classified as Unfavourable Recovering which means that although they are not yet in Favourable Condition, all necessary management measures are place, which if sustained, should result in the habitat reaching Favourable condition over time.

Over the past few months, the most significant operations that have been carried out in the Commons woodland have included:

- Holly thinning (area adjacent to Queensmere Fairway)
- Ride management (Warren Farm Ride)

Holly thinning:

This work was carried out to reduce the dominance of holly in the woodland that is above Queensmere and adjacent to Queensmere Fairway. This work was carried out by an external contractor and will help to achieve several important objectives:

- Holly thinning has provided a more open woodland that is of benefit to the regeneration of trees and associated woodland flora and fauna.
- Holly thinning has made the woodland more accessible for visitors to the Commons.
- Holly thinning has enhanced the surrounding view of Queensmere.
- Holly thinning has improved the safety of visitors to the Commons by improving sightlines along the edge of the Wimbledon Common golf course.



Holly thinning December 2023 to January 2024



Holly pre-thinning (above)



Holly thinning work in progress (December 2023)

Ride Management (Warren Farm Ride)

During the beginning of 2024, the Commons' Maintenance Team began a programme of ride thinning work along one section of Warren Farm Ride. This work has involved coppicing selected trees that were located up to ten metres away from the edge of the ride. The aim of the work has been to create a ride that is approximately 1.5 metres wider than the height of the surrounding trees. This will dramatically reduce heavy shading along this section of woodland and allow an increased level of light reach the woodland floor. This will lead to a long interface between the dense woodland edge and other open nectar sources that are important for invertebrates and other wildlife to thrive.

Where large native trees have been found along the ride, these have been largely untouched unless trees safety work has been required. In all areas of the Commons where woodland rides have been similarly managed, a programme of cutting is carried out on a rotational basis to ensure the ongoing presence of a range of age classes of scrub that will provide an ongoing source of nectar, fruit, seeds, cover and nesting areas around the site.



Creation of deadwood habitats along the edge of Warren Farm Ride

Grassland Management (Wimbledon Common Golf Course)

The Wimbledon Common golf course (WCGC) is a standard 18-hole course which is comprised of improved grassland (tees and greens), fairways, short acid grassland (semi-rough and rough) woodland edge, scrub and remnant heath.

Along with the areas of heathland that are located around the edge of the golf course, the areas of grassland which form the semi-rough and rough provide an important reason for the Commons SSSI and SAC designations.

To help protect and enhance these areas of grassland and heathland, over the past few months we have reduced the coverage of invasive scrub along the edge of four of the WCGC fairways. (Please note: all the names below refer to the course names that are used by the London Scottish Golf Club).

- Fairway number 5: Queensmere
- Fairway number 7: Paradise
- Fairway number 10: Caesar's Camp
- Fairway number 17: Heather



Golf course restoration work.



Caesar's Camp Fairway



Queensmere Fairway

Pond Management

With bird nesting season only a short time away, during the beginning of February 2024, we have ensured that the duck tubes and the two floating platforms at Kingsmere have been provided with new bedding material.



Sarah, photographed in the process of providing the floating platforms on Kingsmere with new nesting material.

Perhaps one of the most novel bird nesting innovations that we have on the Commons are the duck nesting tubes which are positioned on Kingsmere. With mallard numbers declining in the UK, off-ground duck nest tubes provide a simple and effective way of protecting nesting birds. While mallards normally nest on the ground, where they are vulnerable to flooding and predation, by elevating nesting tubes on poles several feet off the ground, the eggs and ducklings are less at risk. Consisting of a wire mesh frame filled with hay, the narrow entrance of the tube provides a nesting site which is both protective and warm enough for the incubating female and her clutch of eggs. Having checked each nest tube during the beginning of 2024, signs of successful nesting from the previous year were found within both tubes.



Duck tubes under construction by Jim Hutchings



Duck tube on site at Kingsmere