

**Public Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on
Monday 13 February 2023 at 4.30pm at the Wimbledon Common Golf Club, Camp
Road, London SW19 4UW**

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

Officers: Steve Bound, Chief Executive (CE)
Peter Haldane, Conservation and Engagement Officer
Angela Evans-Hill, EA to Chief Executive/Communications
Officer (EA to CE/CO)

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

ITEM		ACTIONS
02.23.1	<p>Confirmation of Attendance and Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies were received from:</p> <p>Mr Michael Johnston, Conservator Paula Graystone, Deputy Clerk and Ranger. Maggie May, Fundraising Manager</p>	
	<p>The Chairman began by expressing the Board's sadness at the passing of Sir Robert Andrew, a past MoD appointed Conservator. He was a long-standing Conservator, having served for 36 years from 1973 to 2009.</p> <p>Sir Robert had, despite being in his 90s, remained active, attending the 150th anniversary event at the House of Commons in July 2022 and the Conservators' Dinner in October 2022. He would be deeply missed.</p> <p>The funeral was scheduled for 2.30pm on 8 March 2023 and all were welcome to attend.</p>	
02.23.2	<p>Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interests in Respect of Items to be Considered in this Part of the Meeting</p> <p>None</p>	
02.23.3	<p>WPCC Board Meetings</p>	

	<p>The Resolutions of the Board meeting held on 12 December 2022, and the Minutes of Part A(1) of the Board Meeting held on 12 December 2022 were approved.</p>	
10.22.4	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>The Board noted the report on Matters Arising. There were no further comments.</p>	
02.23.5	<p>Levy</p> <p>The Board noted the Chief Executive's report.</p> <p>The Chairman reported that confirmation of the Council Tax base and the per household rate for 2023/24 had been received from the local Councils. The levy for the average (Band D) property would be £35.96 for the year, which represented an increase of £3.82 per household per annum on 2022/23, or 32p per month. The increase reflected the decision taken in December 2022 to increase the levy by the September 2022 RPI, the maximum allowable under the 1990 levy regulations. The Conservators had given a great deal of consideration to the matter in view of the current cost of living crisis.</p> <p>A letter had been received from the Leader of Wandsworth Council, Cllr Simon Hogg, setting out his opposition to the Board's decision. The Chairman had circulated the letter to all Conservators, also setting out the procedure necessary should any Conservators wish to reconsider and revoke the decision. No requests for the matter to be considered were received and therefore the increase remained agreed.</p> <p>In respect of responding to Cllr Hogg, the Chairman would draft a response, explaining further the reasons for the decision and that none of the Conservators had made a request to reconsider the matter.</p> <p>As Councillor Hogg's letter had been published on Wandsworth Council's website, this had been picked up by some local press and a brief response from WPCC had been provided. WPCC's practice was not to publish letters of this nature or share them with the media when being sent to the recipient. In response to a question, it was noted that it was not possible for WPCC to ask the Council to keep the letter confidential because Wandsworth Council was considered a public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and even if WPCC requested that the letter be considered confidential, this exemption (if it applied) would be subject to the public interest test and it was felt that it would very much be in the public interest for the letter to be disclosed. It was also noted that some of the Conservators had received a copy of the Councillor's letter via their personal e-mail accounts and the Chairman would address this matter in her reply. A copy of the draft letter would be circulated to Conservators for comment.</p>	

	<p>A meeting had also been held with Merton Council on 8 February 2023 at which Merton had remained concerned about the proposed 2023/24 increase and also that the levy was included in their Council Tax “ceiling”. If so, their Council Tax income would drop by some £26,000.</p> <p>With regard to the re-basing of the levy, at the meeting, Merton did not express a single view. There were mixed views on the potential confusion from the inclusion of WPCC’s levy in the council tax invoice as well as more general concerns about the collection mechanism.</p> <p>In response to a question, the Chairman confirmed that at present the effect of the ceiling was a bigger issue for Merton than either Wandsworth or Kingston Councils. It was agreed that a further meeting would be held with Kingston Council as this issue had not been considered when they last met.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>It was agreed that the Chairman would prepare a letter to Councillor Simon Hogg in response to his letter of 24 January 2023 setting out the basis for WPCC’s decision regarding the 2023/24 levy increase.</p>	<p>DNM</p>
<p>02.23.6</p>	<p>Chief Executive’s Report – Non-Confidential Items</p> <p>The Board noted the Chief Executive’s report.</p> <p>Walk and Talk/Healthy Walks</p> <p>The Chairman and the Chief Executive met with representatives of the Walk and Talk Movement, a Merton based CIC who organise group walks in open spaces with the aim of improving physical and mental health and combating loneliness. They currently have walks taking place in a number of open spaces in Merton but would like to organise a regular walk on the Commons. They carried their own public liability insurance and the walks were led by trained volunteers.</p> <p>WPCC’s Conservation and Engagement Officer previously organised and led a programme of Healthy Walks, but these had not taken place since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. The Walk and Talk Movement events appear to be a suitable alternative which place no demand on staff time. The walks are held nationwide and all take place at 10.30am on Saturdays. As this might clash with Parkrun traffic, there would need to be some thought given to a suitable meeting point, preferably one that people could reach on foot.</p> <p>The Board were supportive of the walks.</p> <p>Management Accountant Appointment</p> <p>The Chief Executive reported that terms had been agreed with the preferred candidate. The contract was currently being finalised and should be signed in the next few days. A hand over meeting needed to be arranged with NW.</p>	<p>SB/NW</p>

	<p>New members of the Stakeholder Forum</p> <p>Following attempts to secure greater representation from Putney and Roehampton on the Stakeholder Group, the following have been appointed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carey Botting – who represents a Residents Association in Roehampton (the Chairman advised that Cary Botting was known to her socially). • Angus Robertson – who represents Alton Action, a group established to provide the residents of the Alton Estate with a voice in future plans for the estate. <p>Crooked Billet Consultation</p> <p>Young’s had been in touch to advise that they wished to renew the licence to put deck chairs on the Commons outside the Crooked Billet. However, before offering a new agreement, it had been agreed that a public consultation on the pub’s use of the land would be undertaken. This would need to be put in place in the next few weeks.</p> <p>The consultation materials would be based on those used by WPCC when gathering views on the Spencer benches, with members of the public being able to provide responses via an online survey or a Freepost postcard.</p> <p>The fee would be based on the previous year, increased by RPI.</p>	<p>SB/AEH</p>
<p>02.23.7</p>	<p>Fundraising Update</p> <p>The Board noted the Fundraising Manager’s report and the CE reported in her absence.</p> <p>Several grant applications had been submitted for path restoration works. The public appeal to raise the match finding had now raised some £11,500, halfway towards the £24,000 target.</p> <p>The Community Orchard at Putney Lower Common had now been planted with 10 of the 12 trees having been sponsored. A new sign would be installed to explain the value of the orchard and the varieties used. A community event was being arranged for Sunday 5 March 2023. Concern was expressed about the wooden frames around the trees but it was noted that they would only be in place until the trees were established.</p> <p>Donations from the donation car parking machine were starting to decrease. New clearer signage and posters were being designed with a harder ask to promote the donation scheme to drivers.</p> <p>The Board wished to record their appreciation to Maggie May for her success, particularly with the path appeal and the orchard appeal.</p>	

<p>02.23.8</p>	<p>Land Management Plan</p> <p>The Conservation and Engagement Officer reported that all operational chapters had been written and passed to the Wildlife and Conservation forum for comment. A meeting of the forum was being held on 24 February 2023 to discuss the work so far and to also prepare summaries for each chapter which would also include the key actions. These would provide the basis for the document that the Board would eventually approve.</p> <p>The Board expressed their delight at the involvement of many of the volunteers and the level of their feedback.</p>	
<p>02.23.9</p>	<p>Conservation Update</p> <p>The Board noted the Conservation and Engagement Officer's report.</p> <p>He mentioned the following points:</p> <p>Holly thinning – The work had finished for this year. Since the work started in 2016, over 40 hectares of woodland had been thinned of holly, with 10% of holly being left in each area cleared. This work had opened up the woodland, creating glades and generally letting in more light to allow the flora in the understorey to regenerate.</p> <p>The most recent work had been in the Stag Bog valley mire system to significantly open that up. Another key part of the work was to improve the safety of visitors to the Commons, particularly around the edges of the golf course where sight lines had been improved.</p> <p>The Maintenance Team had been working on Lower Gravelly Ride, opening up the ride to allow light in and improve the biodiversity along the woodland edge. Mature trees had been left as they provided a valuable habitat in their own right. The cut timber was either left to rot down or buried to provide habitat for invertebrates. The latter was particularly good for stag beetles. Some wood was also moved to other sites across the Commons to create habitats.</p> <p>The team had also been working in Stag Bog, clearing some more of the trees which were used on site to create dams. Dead hedging had also been created to help keep visitors away from the area whilst it recovered.</p> <p>Volunteers continued to work on Putney Heath clearing the scrub. Work had also continued cutting back invasive trees around the edge of the small meadow that was located close to the southern section of Centre Path.</p> <p>OB commented that he was preparing some communications on the work being carried out on the mires that could be shared on social media once the areas had started to recover.</p>	

	It was confirmed that the bog feasibility study was well underway.	
02.23.10	<p>Update on the Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons</p> <p>SB gave a verbal update on the Friends.</p> <p>Friends membership was still going well with 585 members. A few members had been lost recently so a membership drive was planned, including some new signs for the notice boards.</p> <p>The Friends Committee was working on a number of forthcoming events, starting with a Zoom talk by Alan Blower on Wednesday 15 February 2023. Following up on the 150th Anniversary Games Day, the talk went into more detail about the history of sports and games played on the Commons. The Conservation and Engagement Officer would be taking the Friends on a Conservation walk in the Autumn.</p> <p>Several walks were being organised including a birdsong walk on 22 April 2023 and a summer walk led by Alan Blower and Nick Manning on the Grand Houses and Residents of Rushmere (date tbc).</p> <p>The Committee was currently working on some events to mark the King's coronation in May 2023.</p> <p>The first quarterly round of the Art on the Commons competition for 2022/23 would come to an end at the end of February 2023.</p>	
02.23.11	<p>WPCC Forum/Group Meetings</p> <p>The Board noted the draft notes of the Wildlife and Conservation Forum meeting held on 10 January 2023.</p> <p>The Board recorded its appreciation for the work of the Forum members, particularly in relation to the current work on the Land Management Plan.</p> <p>OB reported that a meeting was being held on 24 February 2023 with a representative of Citizen Zoo. They had recently reintroduced water vole at the Hogsmill and the meeting would discuss the possibility of reintroducing water vole in the Beverley Brook.</p> <p>The EA to CE/CO reported that Wimbledon Common had been nominated in the BBC Wildlife Magazine's best places to see wildlife. The public were encouraged to vote for their favourite and details would be circulated on social media and via an e-newsletter shortly.</p>	
02.23.12	<p>Calendar Update</p> <p>Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) - As the Chief Executive could not attend the ARC meeting currently scheduled for 7 March 2023 an alternative date would need to be arranged.</p>	AEH

	<p>Constitution Committee At the request of the Chairman, the date of the Constitution Committee meeting scheduled for 26 September 2023 had been brought forward a week to 19 September 2023.</p> <p>Updated meeting invitations would be sent out.</p> <p>The Board congratulated the team for organising a very successful Winter Talk on 7 February 2023 about the importance of ponds as a habitat. OB asked if the Commons could purchase some of the water testing kits that had been mentioned.</p>	<p>AEH</p>
<p>02.23.13</p>	<p>Public Questions on Matters Considered in Part A(1) of this Meeting</p> <p>Before opening the meeting for questions, the Chairman congratulated Windmill Trustee, Asif Malik, for a successful live interview about the Windmill on BBC London recently. A link would be circulated.</p> <p>Crooked Billett</p> <p>Mr Cox was supportive of the Conservators raising money and entering into a licence with the Crooked Billett pub. He did however raise a number of important points, which were addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He questioned the arrangements of the Hand in Hand using the land adjacent to the pub; it was explained that the land in question was not owned by WPCC - He questioned the potential for bias in the survey by customers of the pub; it was explained that WPCC's experience with surveys of this nature were than non-clients were normally also prepared to participate in the survey and this would be monitored by WPCC in analysing the feedback - He raised the issue of the pub taking responsibility for the impact on local residents including picking up all the detritus that gets left, including cigarette butts; it was agreed that this was an important point and would be addressed in the licence - He raised the issue of the noise of the deckchairs being taken in and out with no consideration for the noise impact on local residents; it was agreed that this was also an important point and would be further investigated by WPCC <p>The Chairman thanked Mr Cox for taking time to come and express his views. The decision by the Conservators to enter into a licence last year was prompted by a need to regularise the arrangements and a licence did allow the Conservators to set terms on which the permission would be granted, so this was a positive move. The Board undertook to grant the licence for one year, followed by a public consultation as this would give people the opportunity to give feedback on the arrangements so the points he raised were very helpful.</p>	<p>AEH</p>

	<p>There were a number of considerations that need to be thought about, including the interference of other users of the Commons to enjoy the Commons, impact on the site and the noise issue and whether it was something appropriate for the Commons and did it facilitate people's ability to use the Commons. For example, the licence would stipulate that members of the public could make use of toilet facilities regardless of whether they were using the pub. This was important as WPCC did not provide any toilet facilities in this area of the Common.</p> <p>The CE commented that although the Hand in Hand could not demonstrate that they own the land they use, it was definitely not owned by the Conservators, the land was unregistered.</p>	
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The meeting finished at 5.40pm.

