

# Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

## Minutes of the Conservators' ANNUAL OPEN MEETING held at St John the Baptist Church Hall, Robin Hood Lane, Kingston Vale on Wednesday 18 June 2014

Conservators Present: Mr David Devons (Chairman)  
Sir Ian Andrews  
Mr Derek Frampton  
Mr John Horrocks  
Mr Andrew Simon (Vice-Chairman)  
Professor Robin Touquet

Officers Present: Mr Simon Lee (Chief Executive)

Auditor: Mr Walter Benzie

51 Levypayers and other members of the general public

The Chairman began by welcoming everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He then introduced the Conservators, the Chief Executive and the Auditor.

The Chairman announced that, in view of the imminent Court of Appeal hearing about the Putney Hospital site on 30 June, he did not intend to have any discussion or take any questions about the matter.

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mrs Jenny Evanson, Dr Ros Taylor

### 2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the previous Annual Open Meeting held at Christ Church Hall, 2 Cottenham Park Road, West Wimbledon SW20 0NB on Wednesday 19 June 2013 were approved by the Board and signed by the Chairman.

From the floor, Mr John Cameron commented that at the 2013 meeting he had agreed with the Chairman that he would not ask all nine questions on the paper he had circulated to attendees providing the list was appended to the minutes. Despite this, the Conservators had refused to allow them to be appended. However, a series of telephone calls between himself and the Chief Executive, Mr Lee, that day had resulted in the Conservators reviewing their position and the questions were now attached. The Chairman clarified that although he had initially agreed to this request, the Board had subsequently taken a different view. However the questions were now attached to the minutes.

### 3. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

As this was his first Annual Open Meeting, the Chief Executive, Mr Simon Lee, began by introducing himself to the meeting. He described some of his background and experience of managing open spaces following senior management positions at Cheltenham Borough Council and twelve years with the City of London Corporation managing Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park in north London, all three of which were registered charities. He commented that it now felt as if he and his family had moved out of London, even though Waterloo was just a short train journey

## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

away. The Commons were an amazing mosaic of different habitats and, after a wet and soggy start in March, they were now thriving on the moisture with lush growth. The staff were incredibly passionate, seeing their roles more as a vocation, and the work undertaken by the Conservators, all on a voluntary basis, was to be applauded. That view was not just because he was still within his probationary period, but because it was self-evident that they cared deeply about the site and put in a lot of time to ensure that it was governed in line with the Charity's statutory duties.

As at Hampstead, he could see that passions ran high about almost every aspect of management. The one thing he had learned in his short time was that he would not be able to please everyone and, indeed, there would be something worrying if that were the case. The Commons were dynamic areas of land, shaped by Mother Nature and change was inevitable whether we liked it or not. There was much to be done in terms of building on the work of his predecessors and financial management was no exception.

Moving on to the financial report, the Chief Executive explained that it had been prepared by the Conservators' chartered accountants and auditors, Anova, based in Horsham in West Sussex. They were prepared in accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice.

Dealing with governance issues first, under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 the Conservators were obliged to manage the Commons, protect them and make them available as open space. As an aside, Mr Lee noted that 1871 was the same year that the Hampstead Heath Act brought that open space into public being. Both Acts have almost identical obligations, to preserve as far as may be the natural aspect of the Commons, to keep them open uninclosed and unbuilt upon and to drain level and improve the Commons for the benefit of unrestricted exercise and recreation. Whilst the Heath was transferred from The Lord of the Manor to the Metropolitan Board of Works, the Commons were vested in the management of eight Conservators, with income generated by way of a Levy.

There were currently 20 staff directly employed by the Conservators; these included the Mounted Keepers led by the Senior Keeper, Bill Rowland; an estates and conservation team led by Wildlife and Conservation Officer, Pete Haldane; the ground staff at the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields (REMPF) led by Head Groundsman, Gary Jepson; the business and administrative functions undertaken by the Deputy, Paula Graystone, and PA and communications support from Angela Evans. It was a small team to manage these 1140 acres and, overall, the costs were extremely low when compared with other open spaces in and around London.

The achievements of the past year were set out in pages 3 and 4 of the Report and would be covered by the Chairman in his report. The Chief Executive hoped that, from the Report, the public could see what a broad spectrum of work had been undertaken and that this had been another challenging year financially, but with some excellent achievements.

Moving into the financial report in more detail, the Conservators had a number of funds including:

- The General Conservancy Fund, that met day to day expenses;
- The Election Sinking Fund – for costs associated with Conservator elections;

## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

- The Mill House Fund - a designated fund arising from the enforced sale of Mill House and used for major capital expenditure projects.

The current intention of the Conservators' Reserves policy, given that the 1871 Act did not allow the Conservators to borrow more than £5,000, was to have sufficient funds to sustain activities for one year. This year a decision had been taken to merge the Special Projects Fund with the General Conservancy Fund. Even after this transfer, the general fund of £984,244 still fell short of the target suggested by the current Reserves Policy. This policy would need to be reviewed over the coming year.

The headlines for the year were that the budget showed a deficit of £260,000 when compared with the previous year. There were several reasons for this. Whilst there had been continued efforts through cost saving measures to avoid adding to financial pressures on Levy payers, despite the legal right to do so in line with RPI, the Conservators' decision not to increase the Levy the previous two years had meant they had forgone over £135,000 of potential income. The Levy still remained the principal source of income.

The loss of grant income from the changes by the Rural Payments Agency towards urban commons had further impacted on overall resources. Despite this, staff strived to maintain investment in the acid grasslands and woodlands.

The Chief Executive explained that the increase in staffing costs compared with the previous year, which he was sure would not have gone unnoticed, was largely related to the one-off costs associated with the retirement of the previous Chief Executive during the handover period. In addition, an apprentice had been employed during 2013. There were on-going costs associated with litigation and, together with the departure of the London Broncos from the REMPF, there continued to be an impact on our bottom line.

Our investment funds are managed on behalf of the Conservators by Charlwood Leigh, our independent Financial Advisors. The market value of the Mill House investment at 31 March 2014 was £1,426,013. The return on investment had not been as great as in 2013. The Balance Sheet currently showed an allowance of £103,969 of this designated fund to create a new staff flat at the REMPF that it was hoped would strengthen security in this vulnerable location, to undertake works to improve facilities at the maintenance depot and to offset costs associated with damage caused to land as a result of unauthorised incursions. No monetary resource had been realised from this designated fund at this stage, so those costs had also been met from the General Conservancy Fund.

For the future, the Chief Executive commented that one of his challenges over the coming 12 to 18 months was to develop a more strategic approach to financial management, and especially the Reserves Policy. A better understanding was needed of the overall condition of the Commons' assets, buildings and the natural landscape, not least the tree stock and its associated risks, so as to ascertain how necessary works could be funded on a sustainable basis. Income generation was a matter that needed to be carefully considered.

The Chief Executive commented that he was aware from meetings with visitors and cycling enthusiasts that the condition of the shared use pedestrian and cycling paths left something to be desired, but restoration of these important access routes was expensive and the cost would have to be spread over several years. The Windmill, which the

## **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014**

Conservators owned and had responsibility for managing, was also in need of major repairs, as there was water ingress on the first floor through the flat roof.

The Conservators had appointed an independent consultant to look at the governance arrangements, something that was seen as best practice in a charity from time to time. There was also a need to review the current staffing structure to ensure it was fit for purpose in delivering the Charity's core objectives and meeting the duties under the Commons' foundation legislation.

He hoped over the next few months to be able to get to know the Commons better and to have the opportunity of meeting different Residents' and Business Associations.

Questions on the financial statements were invited.

### **Questions on the Financial Statements**

#### **Mr John Cameron, Putney Lower Common**

Mr Cameron commented that the financial report in the Newsletter had criticised Mr Nicholas Evans because the legal action he had brought against the Conservators had currently cost them some £51,000 that could have been better spent elsewhere. He felt this was grossly unfair as over the previous three years the Conservators had seemingly spent £50,000 on parties, a communications review and a new website. He commented that it was shabby that the Conservators criticised Mr Evans for doing the work they should be doing.

#### **Mr Nicholas Evans, Putney Lower Common**

**Q** Mr Evans commented that the recent Council Tax bill received from Wandsworth Council had not shown the Commons' Levy as a separate item as it had done in previous years. If the Conservators were concerned that Levypayers did not vote should they not approach Wandsworth Council and insist that the Levy be shown as a separate item?

**A** Both the Chairman and the Chief Executive commented that they agreed and that it was only right and proper that the Levy be shown separately. The Chief Executive would approach the Council regarding this matter.

### **4. ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chairman began his report by commenting that, once again, the weather had played a major part in the year. The previous year had been very wet but January 2014 had been the wettest since records began. Large areas of Wimbledon Common had been flooded with a new lake being created on The Plain. It reminded him of Earl Spencer's reason for attempted enclosure in 1864: "the land was boggy and noxious mists arose from it". Usually by June everything had dried up but this year many paths, particularly areas of Nurses' Walk and Inner Park Ride, were still under water.

The storms in October had brought down many trees, including one across Parkside in the night, which the Commons staff had cleared by 6am. This had delayed other works by a few weeks and some fallen trees had yet to be cleared, particularly along Stag Ride where Poplars had fallen onto the back of Putney Vale Cemetery.

## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

The removal of areas of Holly had continued. Holly thrived on the Commons and formed dense areas cutting out light to the woodland floor. In the last year, Holly had been removed from an area near Warren Farm on Wimbledon Common by the Forestry Commission and although the work was labour intensive, the light that could now reach the woodland floor had led to a vast improvement in the area for flora and fauna.

Silver Birch had been cleared to some 15m around Hookhamslade and Bluegate Ponds on Wimbledon Common. Both ponds had become very shaded and falling leaves silted up the ponds, increasing the risk of their drying up. This was particularly important at Bluegate where foxes were then able to reach the island and disturb nesting wildfowl. This sort of work stressed how the Commons have to be constantly managed, otherwise within ten years scrub and Silver Birch, followed eventually by Oak, on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath and scrub on Putney Lower Common would soon take over. The Golf Clubs took care of the fairways and kept them mown and clear of scrub, at a cost of some £160,000 per year.

Unfortunately, there were no cygnets on Queensmere this year. The Swans had tried to nest on the path around Queensmere but were attacked by a dog and, although they had moved to the floating platform, they had made no real attempt to nest. The pair had been taken away by Swan Rescue but the Pen had since died. It was only in the last 7 years or so that swans had been nesting on Queensmere and it was hoped that another pair might take up residence next year, particularly as the nesting platform would be improved. The Coots and Moorhens had nested successfully.

One major problem faced by the Conservators was that of the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM). The Forestry Commission had sprayed infected trees in 2013 and the 100 nests found in 2012 had been reduced to 13 in 2013. They had sprayed again this year but the results of that would not be known for some weeks. The Conservators had no option but to allow the Forestry Commission to spray as the caterpillars could cause rashes and asthma in humans, and could also affect dogs. Unfortunately, an infestation had been discovered at Putney Lower Common in the previous few days, believed to have spread from Barnes Common. The Forestry Commission had been informed and would, hopefully, be spraying in due course

The Bat Conservation Trust had carried out a survey during the summer of 2013 and had recorded 7 species of bat, 3 of which had not been recorded during their previous survey in 2000. The new species were Nathusius Pipistrelle, Natterers Bat and Leisler's Bat.

Repairs to footpaths were planned during the coming months, focusing on areas where path degradation was particularly serious, such as Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common. They would be resurfaced using an MOT Type 1 natural product. The reason for surfacing some paths was that they had quite heavy use and, if they became flooded, the paths became wider and wider as people walked around the flooded area. A well-maintained path therefore did help protect the surrounding flora and fauna.

It had been unfortunate that travelers had found their way onto an area of Putney Heath next to Wildcroft Road by using an angle grinder to break open a metal gate. Although they had only been on site for 7 days, the rubbish they left behind had taken 3 weeks to clear at a cost of £35,000. The police had been very helpful in getting the travelers removed and the Chief Executive was working closely with both the police and local

## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

authorities to help prevent future incursions. The boundary of the Commons had also been strengthened with more banks and posts, and log butts placed in vulnerable spots.

The Windmill was currently being investigated by specialists to locate the problem of a leak either in the roof or the tower. Ongoing maintenance and repairs were also required over the coming year and it was hoped that grants would be available to help pay for the work.

A small roof-space area at the REMPF pavilion had been converted into staff accommodation. This would provide extra security for the site; the resident would be expected to perform extra duties, such as occasional week-end working.

A new Nature Trail booklet would be published shortly, which would describe what to look for on the Nature Trail on Putney Heath. The Stables Open Day last year had been a great success, despite the torrential rain. This year's event would be held on 14 September, with displays and events taking place over the whole day.

The next election for Conservators would be held in February 2015. If anyone was interested in standing they should contact the Ranger's Office, and staff would send out an information pack. Details of meetings for candidates would follow in due course. The Chairman encouraged everyone to vote. Only 19.3% of Levypayers had voted in 2012.

In 2012, a retired Chairman of the Conservators, Mr Derek Harvey-Piper, died and this year the Conservators had erected a bench on Wimbledon Common in his memory. His widow Penny Harvey-Piper wished to have her thanks recorded at this meeting.

Finally, the Chairman thanked the staff for their complete dedication to the Commons - without them nothing would happen.

### 5. GENERAL DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

The main questions were as follows:

#### **Pauline Brueseke, Southfields**

**Q** Ms Brueseke commented that she was an ex-Conservator and, although not a Levypayer now, she had been for many years. She wished to congratulate the Conservators and staff on the job they did. In last year's Newsletter it been suggested that the Newsletter would be moving to a solely electronic format in the not too distant future. Was there any news on this?

**A** The Chairman responded that there were no plans at present, although the Conservators would continue to look at this as hand-delivery of the Newsletter was problematic.

#### **Mr John Cameron, Putney Lower Common**

**Q** Mr Cameron commented that distribution of the Newsletter in Erpingham Road had been non-existent and it taken three calls to get it delivered. Why had the Newsletter not been put on the website?

## **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014**

**A** The Chief Executive commented that the website, contrary to Mr Cameron's earlier comment, had not been updated for many years and was very cumbersome to use. However, he accepted that it should have been put up earlier. It was now on the website.

### **Mr Roland Kerr**

**Q** Mr Kerr commented that there was a tremendous amount of litter on the Merton Extension Fields which adjoined the Common's playing fields. Could the Conservators contact the Council to speak to them about this. He thought the Commons were beautifully kept.

**A** The Chief Executive responded that he would contact Merton Council and speak to them about this.

### **Mr John Cameron, Putney Lower Common**

**Q** A proposal had been put forward earlier this year by Merton Council to build cycle paths along Parkside and Southside. Having considered the matter, the Conservators had decided not to allow the Council to use Commons land to build the paths. He had served a Freedom of Information request on the Council and had received a copy of the letter sent to them rejecting their proposals. The reason for rejecting the proposal was that the Conservators were relying on legislation to preserve the natural aspect of the Commons and confirmed that the Conservators would only undertake works that sought to provide unrestricted exercise and recreation. Please could the Conservators explain their double standards vis-a-vis the proposals for Putney Lower Common and how they preserved the natural aspect of the Commons and what health and exercise and recreation benefits Levypayers would get.

**A** The Chairman reiterated his earlier statement that questions relating to Putney Hospital would not be answered until the litigation had been completed but he would be happy to do so after that.

### **Mr Nicholas Evans, Putney Lower Common**

Mr Evans commented that, as the Conservators would not answer questions on Putney Hospital, perhaps he could make a statement.

Putney Hospital was closed in 1999, almost 15 years ago. On the 30<sup>th</sup> June there was a Court hearing to decide the legality of the easement that the Conservators signed, in confidence, without consulting the Levypayers. If the decision went against the Conservators, he called on them all to resign.

### **Mr Brian Rutherford, Putney Lower Common**

**Q** Mr Rutherford had two questions. Firstly he commented that, ignoring the area around the Putney Hospital, the Conservators had to be congratulated for the way the Commons looked. And if the swans had decided to depart from Wimbledon and Putney Common there were three or four cygnets enjoying the Leg 'o Mutton in Barnes. A very large Plane tree had been taken down at Putney Lower Common the previous week, he would like to know why.

## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

His second question, without discussing the case in the Court of Appeal at the end of the month was: what legally stopped the Conservators from speaking about the case? It was not a trial nor was it taking evidence; it was a judicial review in the Court of Appeal and there was nothing to stop the Chairman commenting on the Putney Hospital site. This was simply a position the Conservators were taking. This was a major issue that the Conservators had had bridging three years and every time a question was asked it was closed down in a disgraceful manner. He insisted that there was no legal basis for them to refuse to answer questions. The Conservators were happy to blame Mr Evans for running up legal costs without having a little introversion themselves. Why, legally, could they not discuss the matter?

- A** The Chief Executive commented that it was not a Plane tree but a Horse Chestnut, and it had been removed as it was dead and had a bleeding canker. Its condition would only have deteriorated and the only sensible course of action was to have it felled, particularly as it was on a roadside with a risk to people. This was not something done lightly but only when necessary. A replacement would need to be considered to maintain that avenue of trees as part of this year's works.

The Chairman responded to the second question by saying that the decision not to answer questions on the Putney Hospital site was because the Conservators had been advised not to by their legal advisors.

Mr John Cameron commented that during a conversation that morning with the Chief Executive regarding the appending of his list of questions to the 2013 minutes, he had been informed that to do so would prejudice the Conservators' position in the Court of Appeal. His view was that it was utter nonsense.

The Chief Executive reiterated that the Conservators' had been advised by their legal advisors not to debate the issue until after the litigation had ended. Once it had ended, all the Conservators would be happy to talk to anyone and answer any questions, but until that time it could compromise their position.

Mr Rutherford asked the Conservators not, therefore, to discuss their position on the Putney Hospital a site, but to discuss their legal advice. Why would they not discuss it? As a retired solicitor he suggested they should look into the legal advice they were being provided with.

Mr Cameron commented that the Conservators continued to refuse to release minutes of meetings with Wandsworth Council. He considered the Conservators were not conducting themselves in the way that they should.

### Mr Robin Ailes, Kingston Vale

- Q** What were the red and green dots on some of the trees for, and what was the experiment in the woods with bags or cloth in the trees?

- A** The Chief Executive responded that these related to the Oak Processionary Moth. The red dots marked trees that had had nests and the green dots marked the area to which the Forestry Commission needed to spray in a 50m circle from an infected tree. He did think it could have been done more sensitively but the Conservators were under Defra notice to spray in order to try and control the OPM, although he



## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

did not think it would ever be eradicated. Some research was being carried out on the life cycle of the OPM by a local student.

### Mr John Cameron, Putney Lower Common

**Q** Mr Cameron commented that, as part of some recent investigations, he had learnt that the car park and drive of the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club was owned by the Conservators but was being used privately. He asked for the historical background on how the Conservators had managed to lose the land.

**A** The Chairman explained that this went back some 30 years or so, to when the Conservators wanted to build a maintenance centre. As it could not be built on the Common, the then Conservators asked the RWGC if they would agree to a temporary arrangement whereby the Club used a small area of Common land as a car park and the Conservators would use some of the Club's land to build a maintenance centre.

Mr Cameron commented that he thought, despite this being a temporary arrangement, the Conservators had effectively lost a large area of land. The Chairman commented that the Conservators had gained as the land was still owned by them and they had been able to build on the land owned by the RWGC.

A member of the audience commented that if an area of land were taken, then another area must be given back. The area he had in mind was that around Tibbet's Corner roundabout which was built in the 60s. Quite a lot of land was taken from the Commons then and in return the Commons gained the extension land on the south east corner of the playing fields.

The Chairman responded that the area taken had been as a result of Compulsory Purchase Powers. Part of Putney Lower Common and the footpath leading up to the Thames, had also been gained.

### Mr Nicholas Evans, Putney Lower Common

**Q** Mr Evans commented that it was noticeable that none of the Conservators lived in Putney. Might it be possible to structure the electoral process so that the votes for each area could only be cast for a candidate in that area. He conceded that Mr Horrocks lived in Roehampton which did form part of Putney. He would like to see more Conservators from Putney.

**A** The Chairman commented that he was also a resident Putney. Despite having an SW19 postcode, his property was in Wandsworth. Mr Horrocks also commented that when elected as a Conservator he had lived on Putney Hill, and had lived in Roehampton for some 12 years but did consider himself a Putney person.

Despite this, Mr Evans felt that there was an imbalance and the Conservators were Wimbledon centric, as could be seen from the Chairman's report which focused on the Wimbledon area. Although Putney Lower Common was much smaller it was probably one of the largest constituencies for Levypayers and more people who have knowledge of Putney and Putney Lower Common should be encouraged to stand as Conservators. He thought perhaps the lack of the number of voters could

## **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014**

be helped if mailings, such as the Newsletter, addressed issues relevant to the Putney Lower Common area.

Sir Ian Andrews thanked Mr Evans for giving him the opportunity to speak about the election in 2015. It was custom and practice for one of the appointed Conservators to be appointed as a Returning Officer; he had been asked to do this for the forthcoming election.

It would be a postal ballot conducted by the Electoral Reform Service (ERS) and to be eligible to vote, individuals must live in the levy-paying area and be on the electoral roll. The closing time and date for the receipt of votes by ERS would be 5pm on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February.

As Returning Officer, he saw it very much as a challenge to achieve an improvement in turnout over previous years. With a view to how he would achieve that, he had discussed this with the Chief Executive and felt that both traditional and more modern means of communication, such as social media, had their part to play. The Communications review had indicated that the Conservators did not communicate as well as they could. It had already been decided that there would be two candidates' meetings, one in Wimbledon and one at Putney Lower Common so the candidates would have the opportunity to introduce themselves and invite the electors to identify whom they would be voting for.

Encouraging people to stand was critical and the Deputy, Paula Graystone, had sets of Candidate Packs that she would be happy to give out to anyone who might be interested. Details for those wishing to stand needed to be received at the Ranger's Office no later than the 7 January to allow for the printing of the ballot papers. This was the Levy-payers' opportunity to have their say about their Commons and Sir Ian Andrews asked the audience for their support in raising awareness of the February 2015 election.

### **Pauline Westcott**

**Q** Was the area near the cemetery on Putney Lower Common owned by the Conservators and did they license the Fair?

**A** The Chief Executive confirmed that the land was part of the Commons and the Fair was licensed.

### **Vivian Reuter, Westside Common**

**Q** With regard to voting, she had had a positive experience of electronic voting using a system call "My Voice". It was very easy to use and she thought the Conservators might get a much better turnout if this were available.

**A** Sir Ian Andrews thanked her for the suggestion. One of the issues is that not everybody has access to the technology required for electronic voting, but he would certainly ask the Chief Executive to investigate this approach.

## Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014

### Andrew Ailes, Kingston Vale

**Q** In the accounts, the REMPF maintenance is listed as £157,000. Was that including staffing? He noted that the income was only £177,000 and he felt that to have chemical fields for a profit of only £20,000 did not seem much of a bargain.

**A** The Chief Executive responded that yes, it did include staffing costs.

### John Cameron, Putney Lower Common

**Q** Mr Cameron asked for an update on progress for finding a tenant for the REMPF.

**A** The Chief Executive commented that a significant number of people had inspected the premises but no-one to date had been able to commit to the site, but he was working very hard on the matter as the London Broncos leaving had had a significant impact on the revenue. He would welcome anyone coming forward with ideas. In response to a question, he commented that Wimbledon Football Club was unlikely to be interested in coming back to the site.

### Giles Holman

**Q** Mr Holman commented that he had seen an alarming prediction in the media over the last couple of months about the general future of Horse Chestnuts in the British Isles. What was the general prognosis on the Commons?

**A** The Chief Executive commented that he could probably talk for another hour on the issue of tree management and diseases in the country at the moment but a whole range of different issues affected many different tree species. The mild winter had not helped, particularly with the Horse Chestnuts. Tree health was a serious issue and with such an enormous variety of indigenous trees on the Commons it was important the matter was taken seriously and monitored. The Chairman commented that, since the health issues affecting Horse Chestnuts had come to light, the Conservators were planting alternative trees.

### Andrew Ailes, Kingston Vale

**Q** Mr Ailes commented that there were a lot of heavy horses on the Commons when he grew up – they would be better than footballers on the Playing Fields.

**A** The Chairman commented that the area had been donated to the Commons specifically for use as Playing Fields.

Mr Ailes commented that that was not true. It was for use as a Memorial and possibly playing fields and not acres of chemical green when it used to be full of life. He strongly objected to the use as playing fields as it used to be full of life.

The Chief Executive commented that one of the things he loved was to see the Mounted Keepers out and about and much preferred them to vehicles; they were an excellent face of the Commons. He thought that there may be some issues with the mowing regime and he had already begun to take a more relaxed approach in some areas, although that brought its own issues. He felt there was more that could be

## **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2014**

done around the edges of the playing fields and thanked Mr Ailes for raising the issue.

The Chairman then thanked the members of the public for attending and invited them to stay behind to have refreshments and ask further questions if they wished. He closed the meeting at 9.15 pm.