

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, APRIL 2014

Minutes of the Conservators' Meeting held on Monday 14 April 2014 at 5pm in the Information Centre, Wimbledon Common, London SW19 5NR.

Conservators Present: Mr D Devons (Chairman)
Sir Ian Andrews
Mrs J Evanson
Mr D Frampton
Mr J Horrocks
Mr A Simon (Vice-Chairman)
Dr R Taylor
Professor R Touquet

Officers Present: Mr S Lee (Chief Executive)
Ms P Graystone (Deputy Clerk & Ranger)
Ms A Evans (PA to the Chief Executive)

2 members of the public

04.14.1 Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman for 2014/15

Mr Frampton reported that he had spoken to the other Conservators and, with their unanimous agreement, he wished to nominate Mr Devons as Chairman and Mr Simon as Vice-Chairman. The Conservators felt that as the new Chief Executive had only been in post for a month, it was important not to make any changes in leadership at this time. This was seconded by Prof. Touquet.

04.14.2 Apologies

None

04.14.3 Declarations of Interest

Mr Devons and Mr Simon confirmed they were both trustees of the Wimbledon Windmill Museum Trust. Mr Simon was also an executive member of the Wimbledon Society and sat on the PCC of Putney Parish. Mr Horrocks confirmed he was an executive member of the Putney Society.

04.14.4 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2014 were approved without amendment.

04.14.5 Matters Arising

Meeting with Justine Greening MP - The Chairman reported that an informal meeting had been held with Justine Greening MP, attended by him, Mr Simon, Mr Horrocks and the Chief Executive, Mr Lee. The main points of discussion had been the travellers and the Putney Hospital site. Ms Greening had understood the problems faced by the Conservators in removing the travellers and would endeavour to ascertain the possibility of the Conservators acquiring the same powers as the local Councils. She had also understood that Conservators had not been involved in the summit meeting organised by

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Wandsworth Borough Council. The Chief Executive reported that a meeting had now been arranged with Mr McCue at Wandsworth Council to take that matter forward.

Attack on Putney Heath - In response to a question from Mr Horrocks, it was reported that nothing further had been heard from the police about the arrest of a man for the attack on Putney Heath last year.

Matters Arising Form - Mr Simon commented that he did not think the form was achieving its aim as many of the items were not being progressed. The Chief Executive reported that he would review the form and discuss the items on it with the staff and report back to the May meeting.

04.14.6 Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive commented that he had spent the previous month getting to know the Commons, meet Conservators, staff and the public.

1. MATTERS ARISING FROM MARCH 2014 MEETING

- i. **Accident/Emergency Procedures** – a further meeting had been held with representatives from the three local riding stables and agreement had been reached on standardising nomenclature for many of the main paths. Ms Evans was currently updating a map highlighting the correct names that would be distributed by the stables to their employees and issued to all staff on the Common. A copy would also be shared with the local Safer Neighbourhood Teams, the London Ambulance Service and the London Fire Authority. Although there was still some work to be done, the Chief Executive felt this was a good, positive start. Sir Ian Andrews commented that this was welcome and a huge step forward. The Conservators asked that they also be provided with a copy of the map.
- ii. **Harvey-Piper Seat** – this seat had now been delivered and installed.
- iii. **Roehampton School gates** – a meeting had been held with the Head Teacher and Property Manager for the school and they had agreed to abide by the terms of the current agreement in keeping the gates open when the school was not in use. The meeting had been followed up with a letter and it appeared that the school were currently abiding by the terms. The situation would need to be kept under review.
- iv. **Bus Turning Circle, Putney Lower Common** – a meeting had been held on-site with representatives from Transport for London (TfL), Conservators and officers of the Commons on Thursday 13 March 2014 to consider the request to facilitate amending the current Licence with TfL to accommodate an increased turning circle for the new Routemaster bus. The Conservators' requirements had been set out at some length in a letter but nothing further had yet been heard. The Chief Executive confirmed that the proposed increase in the turning circle would not affect the young trees that had been planted nearby.

The Chairman commented that no-one was sure how long the original licence had been in place as no copy could be found in the Ranger's Office; it was

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possibly lost during the War. TfL had agreed that they would look through their archives to see if they had kept a record.

- v. **Merton Council, Cycling** – a letter had been sent on behalf of the Conservators stating that the proposal to utilise at least a 2.3m-wide strip of Common land for the construction of a shared use pedestrian and cycle route from the Parkside junction with Cannizaro Road to Tibbet's Corner was unacceptable. Nothing further had been heard from Merton Council.
- vi. **Book by Archivist** – a meeting had been held with the Archivist to update him on the Conservators' views regarding funding the book proposal.
- vii. **REMPF War Memorial** – a meeting with Mr Mays of the Wimbledon Society has been arranged for 24 April. Mr Simon read out an extract from the inscription on the memorial that implied that it should remain a simple form of memorial and the area around it should be left to nature. The Chief Executive thanked Mr Simon and advised he would draw this statement to Mr Mays' attention when they met on site as it underpinned the commitment to preserve the natural aspect of the area.
- viii. **Water Trough, Parkside** – a letter had been sent to the Drinking Fountain Association confirming that the Conservators did not wish to see the trough moved onto the Common. A response had been received advising that the Association would consider its relocation elsewhere.
- ix. **Bookfest** – a Licence had been issued to the organisers of the Bookfest setting out the terms under which they could hold an event on Wimbledon Common, including the need to seek appropriate licences from the local authority. Nothing further had been heard and this would be followed up this week. The Chief Executive commented that he intended to issue licences for all major events held on the Commons, including the Village Fair, Rugby 7s etc.

GENERAL UPDATES

- i. **Putney Lower Common Hospital** – the Oral Hearing for an application by Nicholas Evans for permission to Appeal the Judgment of Mr Justice Wyn Williams was held at the Fleet Street Law Courts on Thursday 3 April 2014 before Lord Justice Rimer. Permission to Appeal was granted and a copy of the Order had been sent to the Conservators for their information.
- ii. **Paths** – regular maintenance of the footpaths was essential and the Chief Executive commented that his initial thoughts were that the use of planings was not appropriate for long-term repairs. They were a cheap non-binding aggregate that did not work well for repair and patch, despite the best efforts of the staff. He would be preparing a more detailed report for the Conservators' consideration at the May meeting which would set out a recommendation for alternative aggregates and also a programme of reinstatement works. He was obtaining quotes for repair work to some paths that staff had indicated were a priority. He understood the need to maintain a natural aspect and he had no wish to urbanise the Commons, but the main footpaths needed to be fit for purpose and accessible for all.

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- iii. **Car Park at the Windmill** – The Keepers had carried out a survey on the use of the Windmill car park. Whilst there was no doubt that provision of a free car park was a valuable asset for users of the Commons, measures to tighten parking controls and enforcement on surrounding streets taken by Merton Council meant that it was unlikely that pressure on the Windmill car park would ease. The survey had provided some empirical data to help to get a better understanding of the issues around car park management. Whilst the majority of users only stayed for a short period, at least 25 visitors stayed all day. The Chief Executive reported that he had made contact with Parkside Hospital as it was clear many of their staff were parking in the car park and, on one occasion, there had been an altercation with a member of the public who had approached them about it.

The weekends were also busy and he was concerned that on Saturday and Sunday mornings Keepers were being used to control parking and this took them away from their patrolling duties when the Commons were at their busiest. Further investigations were necessary to consider what options were available for the Conservators in managing this sensitive issue.

- iv. **Responsible Dog Control** – there had been several dog-related incidents over the previous months where lack of effective control of dogs had resulted in disturbance and potential injury to other visitors' enjoyment of the Commons.

Both the Wimbledon Common and London Scottish Golf Clubs had expressed their concerns in a recent letter about the detrimental impact of inappropriate dog control, particularly damage to the golf greens. The impact of poor dog control had resulted in three members resigning from each of the Clubs. A meeting was being arranged with the Clubs to discuss further how best to mitigate these issues. There had also been a couple of incidents where dogs had antagonised horses from the local stables, resulting in riders being thrown to the ground.

There was no doubt that this was an increasingly serious issue across the Commons, including Putney Lower Common, and needed addressing. Ms Evans was currently updating the dog-walking Code of Conduct and a small piece would appear in the Newsletter asking visitors to respect each other and not to allow their actions to spoil others' enjoyment of the Commons. Prof. Touquet commented that many visitors had no idea how much the golf clubs contributed financially to the upkeep of the Commons and he felt it was important that this was communicated. Sir Ian Andrews asked if, as landowners, the Conservators would be culpable in the event of a serious incident. The Chief Executive would look into putting more informative signage at the main entrances to the Commons and Mr Frampton suggested that the issue of where dogs should be on leads be looked at again.

- v. **Oak Processionary Moth** – a meeting had been held with representatives from Natural England, the Forestry Commission and officers from the Commons to discuss arrangements for managing the Oak Processionary Moth in 2014. As in 2013, the works would be coordinated through the Forestry Commission and spraying would take place during May. It was important that works were undertaken to control this pest so that everyone could continue to enjoy the Commons safely.

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- vi. **Woodland Management** - The initial phase of works to thin the holly around the Warren Farm area of Wimbledon Common had been completed and some 6ha of woodland had now been opened up. In 2015, the second phase of works funded by the Forestry Commission would commence, opening up another 14ha of woodland. Working with the Forestry Commission, and supported by Natural England, a further external grant application had been submitted through the England Woodland Grant Scheme to continue with the programme of holly removal in 2015/16. The Chief Executive commented that he believed the work was important in bringing woodland back to a healthy condition. The uncontrolled growth of holly had choked the woodland floor preventing other vegetation from growing and had also smothered existing mature trees. He was keen to support this work and the Conservators accepted his recommendation of a further application to the Forestry Commission for an England Woodland Grant.
- vii. **Wimbledon Area Traffic Scheme** - It had been brought to our attention that the London Borough of Merton had commenced a public consultation exercise regarding proposals for a significant traffic scheme in Copse Hill – Ridgway – Woodhayes Road and Southside Common areas.

Having studied the overall traffic scheme proposals, there was serious concern that, if implemented in full, there would be an adverse impact on Wimbledon Common as it was most likely that commuter traffic coming from the A3 would seek to avoid the new traffic calming measures along Copse Hill – Ridgway routes and would instead use West Side Common and Cannizaro Road as a short cut.

In addition, Merton was seeking to create a dedicated cycling route through the grass banks along Southside Common. The Conservators' concerns had already been outlined to the Council in September 2013.

The key questions regarding this proposal were:

1. What advantage/benefit would the introduction of a dedicated cycle track bring to users of the Commons?
2. Does introduction of this route meet current cycling policies for the Commons?

In response to the first question, the 1871 Act recognised the great local and public advantage of keeping the Commons, protecting its natural state and preserving it as an open space for public and local use, for the purposes of exercise and recreation. Whilst the Conservators have rights to "make and maintain roads and ways", this is not a wholly unqualified discretion and needed to be considered in relation to the duties above. Given that the proposed cycle track would run along the edge of Wimbledon Common, it was difficult to see what, if any, benefit was afforded to users of the Commons, particularly as this proposal was clearly being promoted to encourage commuter cycling rather than recreational activities.

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In addition, given the existing traffic calming measures in place along Southside Common, there was little justification for a separate dedicated cycle track as any traffic speeds were already being controlled.

Further, the reduction of the grass banks, some of which are on Common land would be detrimental to the "natural aspect and state" of the Common and there would be inevitable damage, some serious, to the roots of mature trees along the grass banks. Whilst the majority of the proposed dedicated cycle track removed grassed banks that did not belong to the Conservators, Commons staff had maintained the entire width of these grassed areas for many decades, and their removal could potentially result in unwarranted reputational damage to the Conservators.

The Conservators had also, following a high profile court case, entered into Deeds of Rights of Way with several local residents along Southside Common. Some of the land that Merton required for use of the cycle track fell within land where there are obligations on the residents "to maintain the surface of the accessway". As might be expected, some of those residents had raised serious concerns regarding the creation of the cycle track and the impact on their Agreements. There was a risk that if this land were to be incorporated into the cycle track they would pursue the Conservators.

Regarding the Conservators current policy on cycle routes, these state:

- i. Cycle routes are primarily for recreation, not for going from A-B off the Commons;
- ii. No cycle routes are solely for bicycles, since pedestrians can walk anywhere (therefore the term 'cycle route' rather than 'cycle track' should be used);
- iii. All cycle routes are with pedestrian (and/or horse) priority.

The proposed dedicated cycle track does not align itself with any of these policies.

On the basis of the above, the Chief Executive recommended that the Conservators refuse Merton's request that part of the Common along Southside Common be used to construct a dedicated cycle track. This was unanimously agreed and the Chief Executive undertook to write to the Council accordingly.

- viii. **Events** – confirmation had now been received that Roses Funfair wished to utilise Putney Heath from 3 to 12 October 2014, dependent on weather conditions. A licence would be prepared for this visit, along with their other visit to Putney Lower Common in May.
- ix. **Wimbledon Village Fair** – a meeting had been held with the Chief Executive and the Finance and Administrative Manager of the Wimbledon Guild to discuss the forthcoming Village Fair to be held on Rushmere on Saturday 21 June 2014. A Licence has been prepared by Ms Graystone setting out the basis upon which the Guild will operate, together with the fee for the use of Common land. A further meeting was taking place in May to discuss the terms. Permission had been given to allow car retailers to put cars on show, but not to

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be available for sale. A specific clause in the licence had been included to cover this issue.

- x. **Windmill Repairs** – Although the current procurement exercise for Phase 1 works to the Windmill were nearing completion, the Chief Executive had met with Marcus Beale to discuss whether it would be possible to delay repairs to give him an opportunity to look into opportunities for external funding. Mr Beale was therefore looking for an expert who could undertake a further assessment of the risk of deterioration and structural stability of the beams supporting the tower and damage sustained by water ingress. If the risk was significant, then the work would go ahead immediately, but if not, he recommended to the Conservators that the opportunity for external funding be at least investigated. This was agreed.

Mr Simon commented that at the recent Windmill Trustees' meeting, a discussion had been had on Mr Beale's preference for using zinc cladding on the tower. It was appreciated that whilst this may have been used historically, and indeed was likely to be more economically viable as a longer term solution, the Conservators considered it would be look so different from the wooden cladding used in recent decades that locals and visitors alike would be against such a proposal.

It was suggested that, if external funding were not forthcoming, a public appeal could be made for funds.

The Chief Executive would hopefully have more information for the Conservators at their May meeting.

- xi. **Rugby 7's** – The Commons had hosted another very successful Rosslyn Park HSBC National Schools Sevens tournament. It had been pleasing to see the facilities being used as they should. The only negative had been the unfortunate damage sustained to pitches on the Extension field as a result of inappropriate access of the area by large vehicles. Costs for reinstatement were being pursued through Rosslyn Park.

Management

- i. In reviewing existing management arrangements, regular Senior and full staff meetings had been implemented
- ii. The Chief Executive commented that one of the best ways for officers to advise on management issues, and for Conservators to think about long-term objectives for governing the Commons and determining future policies, was to discuss them on site. He therefore proposed to reintroduce two Conservator walks per annum, one in June/July and the other in November, visiting different parts of the Commons on each occasion. These could be held on a Saturday morning or summer evening. Staff would be included to give them an opportunity to showcase their work to the Conservators. The Conservators agreed to, and welcomed, this suggestion.

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Communications

- i. The proposal to have the Nature Trail booklet professionally set out and printed had been progressed and it was hoped this would be available from early June and officially launched at the Bioblitz weekend in July 2014. Some minor issues on the Nature Trail needed to be addressed and this would be done in the near future.
- ii. A more pro-active approach had been taken with Twitter and this had resulted in one of the Commons' Tweets being picked up by the local newspaper and used on the front page of their website.
- iii. A useful meeting had been held with Mrs Evanson and Mr Fricker of Haygarth Communications to talk through the Communications Review 2013. One of the recommendations of the review was to prepare some templates enabling notice boards, fact sheets, display boards etc. to be produced in a consistent style. The cost of these could be accommodated from operational budgets and would prove valuable in enabling staff to prepare information in a standardised format for visitors to learn more about the site and its management.

Mrs Evanson commented that she had been spoken to Mr Tony Kane, Editor of the Time and Leisure magazine, and he would be happy to run a press release about the election and the Bioblitz. This opportunity would be followed up.

- iv. Newsletter - the Conservators considered the latest proof of the Newsletter and would pass any comments to Ms Evans for inclusion. It was noted that the article on Putney Hospital would need to be updated in light of recent events. It was also agreed to remove the final paragraph from the Chairman's Report which stated that future issues of the Newsletter would be sent electronically. This had not yet been agreed by the Board; this was something the Chief Executive would need to consider as part of a wider review of communications and report to the Board before any decisions were made on how best to proceed.

04.14.7 Natural History Sub-Committee

Dr Taylor reported that there had been two meetings held in March; the first was the regular Sub-Committee meeting, and the second was a meeting with invited experts to discuss the routine monitoring and the Bioblitz.

At the first meeting, Mr Haldane had updated the Sub-Committee on the management of the holly, the work on the Nature Trail, including the provision of nesting boxes which were already being used, the printing of the new Nature Trail booklet, and also the mowing of the Plain.

Following discussions with local experts on routine monitoring, an opportunity had arisen to reinstate the Pete Guest Memorial Bat Walk. The first walk would coincide with the Bioblitz in July and would, hopefully, continue each year. The volunteer was an expert on bats and had led many similar walks.

On the Plain, marker points had now been installed to provide geo-referencing points and Kingston University had offered to carry out some soil monitoring.

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The Queensmere swans had begun to build a nest on the bank rather than on the nesting platforms, but after disturbance from dogs they had abandoned that nest and moved to one of the platforms.

The meeting with local experts had been an excellent and beneficial opportunity to seek their advice on how to carry out the monitoring at the Bioblitz, and also to ask for their assistance. Some had been keener on the routine monitoring, others had also expressed an interest in helping out with the Bioblitz.

The routine monitoring would be informal, with people contributing as and when they could.

Since the meeting, one or two people who had not initially been interested in helping were now keen to join in. The Chief Executive had also held a meeting with one of the volunteers who was keen to carry out a visitor survey. The London Natural History Society had also offered to provide one or two volunteers to help out in areas where expertise had been lacking, particularly insects.

It had been agreed that the Bioblitz would not be restricted to the Plain, but would utilise the surrounding woodland and heathland to make it of greater interest to the public.

Dr Taylor would be working with Ms Evans to produce a monitoring form and to discuss advertising and also any equipment that would need to be purchased for use by the public.

In response to a question from Dr Taylor, there was no objection to some of the experts joining the Sub-Committee on their woodland walk on 7 May.

Mr Frampton commented that the involvement of local experts was an excellent approach, and Dr Taylor should be congratulated for arranging it. The regular monitoring would hopefully produce good information for future management. Also non-experts who took part in the Bioblitz might take up an interest in the ecological work being carried out on the Commons. Sir Ian Andrews suggested that local journalists should be encouraged to attend and write follow-up articles to further engage the public.

04.14.8 Any Other Business

Commons Levy - Mr Horrocks commented that the leaflet accompanying the Council Tax notice from Wandsworth Council had not mentioned the Commons Levy. The booklet that could be applied for did make mention of it, but appeared to imply that the Levy had not increased this year. In fact, although the total Levy had increased, the amount payable by individual Levy-payers had decreased. Mr Horrocks was concerned that misleading information was going out to Levy-payers. Mr Frampton advised that information on the Levy had been included in the Council Tax bills from Merton.

04.14.9 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 12 May 2014 at 5pm at the Information Centre.

The meeting finished at 6.25pm

