

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators – June 2018

Minutes of the Conservators' ANNUAL OPEN MEETING held at Christ Church Hall, Cottenham Park Road SW20

Conservators: Diane Neil Mills, Elected (Chairman)
Shirley Gillbe, Elected
David Hince, Elected
Peter Hirsch, Elected
Sarah-Jane Holden, Elected
Mike Rappolt, Appointed MoD
Dr Ros Taylor, Appointed DEFRA
Nigel Ware, Appointed Home Office

Officers: Simon Lee (Chief Executive)

Auditor: Simon Webber, Kreston Reeves

Approximately 80 Levy-payers and other members of the general public.

1. Welcome **Chairman**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly those past Conservators present and thanked them for the contribution they had made over the years. The Chairman introduced herself and then asked the Conservators, Chief Executive and Auditor introduced themselves.

The Chairman explained that under the founding legislation, the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871, the permanent auditor was appointed by the Chairman of the Court of Quarter Sessions for the county of Surrey. That role had now been assumed by the Director of Corporate Services at Merton Council and the Chairman was pleased to report that the Director had approved the appointment of Kreston Reeves as Auditor.

2. Apologies **Chairman**

None

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of 21st June 2017 **Chairman**

The Minutes of the meeting had been approved by the Board of Conservators and the Chairman asked for any comments on the minutes which would be recorded in the minutes of this meeting. No comments were forthcoming.

4. Chairman's Report **Chairman**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The open meeting is traditionally the occasion on which the past year's activities are reviewed. But I think on this occasion, as we approach the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Commons, it is appropriate to begin by looking even further back.

It is a great tribute to our ancestors who recognised the importance of preserving open spaces in urban environments, which by the 19th century in particular were increasingly under threat of enclosure.

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The Metropolitan Commons Act of 1866 allowed for the first time ever the preservation of open space under the management of public bodies. The act applied to the area within a 15 mile radius of Charring Cross and under this legislation a number of Commons were created including Mitcham Common, Clapham Common, Petersham Common and Barnes Common to name but a few.

But Wimbledon and Putney Commons were different. Perhaps it was because of the power and influence wielded by Sir Henry Peek, MP who led the movement to transfer the land from Earl Spencer to a body of Conservators, but Wimbledon Common together with Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common was as unique in its governance as in its physical character.

Not only were Wimbledon and Putney Commons established under a separate Act of Parliament in 1871, but the organisation was granted almost unprecedented independence with five directly elected Conservators and three cabinet level appointed Conservators, mandated to represent both local and public interests. Importantly, the Conservators were granted direct tax raising powers. In the words of Henry Peek, “Wimbledon and Putney Commons had no parallel in the United Kingdom”.

In contrast, the various Commons that were founded under the Metropolitan Commons Act were typically constituted with larger governing bodies, appointed by local authorities or in some cases by the lords of the manor, and funded by government grants.

The Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871 vested the management of the Commons in a body of Conservators to preserve, protect and enhance the Commons and to keep it for ever open, unenclosed and unbuilt on for the purposes of recreation and exercise. It was, in the words of Henry Peek, “1,000 acres of the most beautiful common land in the whole of England, consisting of wood and water, and a magnificent open plateau to be maintained for general enjoyment.”

I should add that in that same year, Henry Peek was also involved in establishing Wandsworth Common under similar governance arrangements. Unfortunately, however, by the time the Wandsworth Common Act of 1871 was enacted, the open space had already suffered from both enclosure and the railway. Furthermore, its independence was to last a mere 16 years before it was subsumed into the colossus of the Metropolitan Board of Works and ultimately transferred to Wandsworth Council.

We are therefore very fortunate that the magnificence and independence of Wimbledon and Putney Commons have endured the test of time. And as Conservators, we recognise the enormous responsibility with which we have been entrusted to provide the stewardship for this unique resource.

Demonstrating our ability to provide that governance is therefore our first priority. In May 2018, Conservators met with the Charity Commission to provide early sight of various initiatives that were under consideration by the new board to further enhance operational effectiveness. A further meeting with the commission to provide an update on these initiatives, which relate to both governance and operations is scheduled for this September.

The commission has stated that it expects to publish the final report relating to the easement in Putney Lower Common in late October 2018. The report will also address the 2018 Conservator elections, in response to complaints raised with the commission. As a board, we have already agreed to codify rules for candidates as well as internal procedures, with a view to ultimately updating the election byelaws.

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As a governing body, we have just completed a review of the strategy and business plan and agreed three emerging areas of focus that address immediate issues and help secure the long-term future of the Commons.

1. Long-term Investment – We are fortunate to have a dedicated levy to finance the Commons, which provided roughly 70 percent of the unrestricted revenue of 1.7 million in 2018. Although this revenue is sufficient to meet the routine operating and maintenance costs, it does not allow for a sustainable level of investment in the assets.

As such, there is a growing and increasingly urgent need for substantial investment, particularly in the buildings that house our machinery and operational centres, as well as other infrastructure including footpaths, horse rides and cycle paths.

Although we are starting to consider possible amendments to the levy, the timescales involved in that process would be protracted. In the short to medium term therefore, various voluntary fundraising initiatives are under consideration, including a possible major campaign to coincide with the 150th anniversary in 2021.

2. Access – The 1871 Act was clear; the Commons were intended to be used and one of the greatest features of the Commons has always been the harmonious way in which the diverse interests co-exist. And accommodating the competing and often conflicting demands that inevitably arise was likely to have been as challenging in the 19th century as it is today.

Although we no longer have to juggle the needs of the National Rifle Association with those of the local polo club, there is still a need to take a structured approach to considering the numerous requests from groups ranging from schools to running organisations. As such, we are in the process of constructing a decision framework that will hopefully allow us to systematically evaluate the demands on the Commons whilst ensuring that we meet our duties under both the 1871 Act and charity legislation.

In an age of ever growing demands for formal uses, it is important to remember that the Commons have also always been and remain important for their informal uses. As so eloquently put by its founder, “To pedestrians, it offers unequalled advantages and to all the very best of air with cheerful rural surroundings”.

3. Land Management – The unique nature of the Commons extends not only to its history and governance but to its ecology. To again quote Henry Peek, “there were flowers and insects which were scarcely to be found on any other common in England”.

The Commons Strategy identifies the need to put in place a Land Management Plan for the fragile and varied habitats across the Common. This includes opportunities to increase the diversity and structure of our woodlands as well as develop and protect the rare and important heathland habitats for wildlife.

I should add that this area in particular depends on and thrives because of the involvement of volunteers. We are keen to further develop this area to provide a meaningful and enjoyable experience for all those who so generously give their time and expertise.

The strategy is ambitious and as Conservators it is our role to ensure that the individual initiatives are properly defined, well-resourced and delivered with excellence. We are therefore very fortunate in that its delivery rests with a strong team of capable and dedicated employees for whom the Commons are not only their workplace but their home.

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The team is led by a diligent and insightful chief executive, who will speak further about the specific activities and achievements of the past year, but I would first like to ask Nigel Ware, Chairman of the Finance and Investment Committee, to present the financial statements.

5. Presentation on the Financial Statements, Nigel Ware

Good evening. I'm Nigel Ware and I was appointed as a Conservator by the Home Secretary in March 2018. As I am the accountant member of the Board, I am going to give this short presentation on the annual financial statements and I will take any questions on them at the end of my talk.

The financial statements will be found starting on page 20 of the annual report document.

Firstly, I would like to deal with Statement of Financial Activities which is in essence the profit and loss account of the charity. The important thing to remember about charity accounts is that there are two types of funds – unrestricted funds and restricted funds.

Restricted funds are those funds that have been given to the charity for a specific purpose and may only be used for that purpose. In our case the restricted funds during the year were The Windmill Restoration Fund, the Footpath Appeal and the Horseride Appeal. All other funds received are unrestricted funds and can be used generally for the purposes of the charity. Within unrestricted funds it is possible for the Board at its discretion to designate funds for a particular purpose and the charity does this for Election Expenses and the Mill House Fund which arose from the compulsory purchase of the Mill House in 2007.

You will see from the Statement of Financial Activities that the results are broken down into the two types of funds. If we look at the restricted funds you will see that we received £100k of income for the year and spent £45k leaving a balance of £55k to be added to the restricted fund balance brought forward from the previous year.

Moving on to the unrestricted funds. Our income this year was £1,663k which was £120k higher than last year. The main components of this increase were an increase of £81k in the levy income and an increase of £53k in income from sports facilities.

A consideration of our expenditure is complicated by the inclusion of a number of non-cash figures relating to the Local Government Pension Scheme. By non-cash I mean that these are items which under the relevant accounting standard are required to be charged to the Statement of Financial Activities but do not result in us having to make a payment to the pension scheme in respect of them. These additional non-cash costs amounted £257k in the year ended 31 March 2018. Putting these additional costs to one side our expenditure on unrestricted funds was £1,617k which was a reduction of £272k in comparison with the previous year. The main reasons for this reduction were a fall of £187k in our legal expenses and a reduction in our pension shortfall payments of £79k.

The overall impact of these increases in income and decreases in expenditure was an operating profit of £46k before the non-cash items relating to the LGPS.

Taking the non-cash items into account we ended up with net expenditure of £212k for the year to which we add an unrealised loss on our investment portfolio of £37k and an actuarial gain on the LGPS of £134k giving a net decrease in unrestricted funds of £115k for the year. The unrealised loss on the investment portfolio arose in the first quarter of 2018 as a result of the decline in the stock markets and has subsequently been reversed after the year end.

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I would now like to turn to the balance sheet which you will find on page 21. The charity's net assets before the LGPS liability were £1,858k at the year-end which was £63k more than last year.

Unfortunately, we then have the pension scheme liability which turns the net assets of £1.9m into net liabilities of £1.1m.

The cash flow statement on page 22 shows that our cash balances increased by £161k during the year. I have mentioned the LGPS a number of times this evening and it would perhaps be helpful if I explained a little more about it. We are participants in the London Borough of Merton's pension scheme which includes not only the Council's own employees but also staff in a number of schools around the Borough. Every three years the pension scheme's actuaries carry out a detailed actuarial valuation of the fund and it is this valuation which determines how much the WPCC has to pay into the pension scheme. The last triennial valuation was carried out as at 31 March 2016 and its results impacted the contributions that we were required to make for the three years from 1 April 2017. At the time of the last valuation the Merton Pension scheme had assets sufficient to cover 94% of its accrued liabilities. The regular contributions that we actually pay to the pension scheme are at the rate advised by the actuary and apart from being sufficient to cover the current service costs of our employees are aimed at making good the 6% shortfall in assets.

Unfortunately, the net pension scheme liabilities shown in our balance sheet are computed on the basis of the relevant accounting standard which adopts a slightly different methodology from that used for the purposes of the triennial valuation. Consequently, we end up with the substantial liability shown in the balance sheet.

Looking ahead to the current financial year our budget shows a small surplus for the year. However, during the torrential rain in May we suffered a significant ingress of water into our maintenance building and it became apparent that we will have to incur one-off expenditure in replacing the roof which will result in us incurring a loss for the year. The cost of replacing the roof will be borne by the Mill House Fund which is a designated fund within our unrestricted funds.

That concludes my presentation on the accounts but I will do my best to answer any questions that you may have.

Mr M Housden, Southside Common

Q. In relation to the pension scheme, had consideration been given to a defined contribution scheme as opposed to a defined benefit scheme. Very few organisations these days have defined benefit schemes.

A. Mr Ware commented that he agreed with Mr Housden and this was something that the Board would consider but it was thought that because of some historical quirk in relationship between the Council and WPCC, a change would not be straightforward.

Mr C Hilton, Wimbledon Village

Q. With reference to restricted and unrestricted funds, when you are fundraising for a specific campaign and you overachieve your objective the money should be handed back. Is it possible to ensure that a statement is included to ensure that any overachievement can be put into general funds and not returned.

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A. Mr Ware commented that the footpath appeal was closed once the designated amount was reached. He agreed that a statement should be included for future appeals regarding excess amounts received.

Mr K Luck, past Conservator

Q. Two questions, it did not appear to come out clearly in the accounts that the Conservators ended the year with an increased income, reduced operating expenditure and an operating level surplus. Although by necessity the statutory accounts were complicated, Mr Luck asked whether in presenting the accounts in future, there could be something that explained to levy-payers the accounts in a more simple way, alongside the statutory accounts.

A. Mr Ware referred to page 8 of the annual accounts that showed that the organisation had achieved a small operating surplus. Mr Ware explained the implications arising from the pension fund on the overall funds that showed a net deficit £1,155,000.

Q. His second question was to ask whether it could be established if the organisation was a going concern and it would be helpful to set out short, medium, and long term expenditures to the Levy-payers.

A. Mr Ware advised that the Board were currently reviewing the priorities within the Business Plan setting out its three-year financial plan.

Tracy Pattison, Putney Lower Common

Q. Ms Pattison asked where the income from the Little Forest Folk School was shown on the accounts.

A. Mr Ware responded that income from schools was covered in page 27, note 3.

As there were no more questions, the Chairman asked the Board to confirm that they were happy for her as Chairman to sign the accounts in accordance with Section 9.1 of the Commissioner's Clauses Act 1847. The Auditor was also required to sign. There were no objections and the Chairman and Auditor signed the accounts accordingly.

6. Chief Executive's Presentation, Simon Lee

One of the most rewarding aspects of the position of Chief Executive of Wimbledon and Putney Commons is the opportunity to work with many different individuals and organisations to further the objectives of our Charity.

Three examples of this stand out in looking at our achievements over the past financial year:

Firstly, we were delighted to announce that both Wimbledon Common and, for the first time of entering, Putney Lower Common both won Gold Awards in the Commons of the Year category of the London in Bloom Awards.

Judged under a broad range of criteria including community involvement, conservation, maintenance of facilities and ensuring the welfare of users, both Commons scored extremely well in all categories, achieving an 'outstanding' standard under the judges marking criteria.

These awards are a real endorsement of the hard work all our staff and volunteers put in to ensure the Commons remain a wonderful place to visit. We were particularly delighted with the result at Putney Lower Common, signifying that the recent landscape work to restore the

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Commons, providing enhanced woodland habitats, new hedge/shrub plantings and wildflower meadows have been recognised as a success by an independent judge.

Secondly, is the success of fundraising, a new initiative for the Charity. In July last year we launched an Access for All Appeal to raise funds to restore the Inner Windmill Road, one of the major arterial routes that run through Wimbledon Common. We weren't sure how you would respond, but by December 2018 we had to close the Appeal two months early because we had achieved our goal of raising £55,000. Thank you to everyone who contributed, the major works are complete and it is our intention to hold an event to celebrate the achievement later in the year.

Linked to this the Wimbledon Village Stables also started an appeal to raise funds for the restoration of the horserides. Some £30,000 was raised that have seen improvements to Bluegate Ride and also the Sandy Ring. We'd very much like to thank Carol and Caroline from the Stables for their support. Seeing riders enjoying the Commons and trotting through the Village is a wonderful sight, and to think the Commons are just eight miles from Trafalgar Square.

Thirdly, our iconic Windmill, as part of our Heritage Lottery bid it was our ambition to increase visitor numbers and, well, for the bicentenary celebrations the Windmill Trustees achieved something quite astonishing. Visitor numbers over the past few years have averaged around 3,000 but during 2017 they rose to just short of a staggering 17,000. Not only that, but having made the museum free entry, income rose from just over £6,000 to nearly £10,500.

As well as these achievements we continue to build on our volunteering opportunities. Last year some 471 volunteers contributed over 3,500 hours. Our Saturday "scrub bashers" are now an integral part of our team restoring and enhancing our rare heathlands. Peter Haldane our Conservation and Engagement Officer has recently launched a mid-week estate volunteer team. The estates teams current project is to paint and restore the two hay rakes outside the Ranger's Office.

Managing a site as complex as the Commons we need to understand how our activities are impacting the various habitats. Under the leadership of Dr Ros Taylor our growing team of monitoring volunteers play a crucial role. From the data collected on a range of different flora and fauna, Ros has prepared detailed reports helping us gain a better understanding of the management of The Plain. These reports can be viewed on our website.

Events are an increasingly important way in which we are able to share and help improve the understanding of the importance of the Commons and bring the community together. These include our annual BioBlitz weekend of nature with bat walks, moth surveys, dragonfly and butterfly walks, the Commons Open Day (this year being held on the 9th September), our annual management walks and talks and for the first time last year a Christmas Craft Fair.

We have also introduced a series of activities for families, this included a Halloween Treasure Hunt and a very successful Easter Egg Hunt over the Easter weekend. Approximately 300 children completed the egg hunt around the Nature Trail and filled in their leaflets, and at least as many entered the colouring competition in the Information Centre. What was particularly encouraging was that many of the families commented that they had never brought their children to the Commons before.

In connection with the commemorations of World War I, The Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust launched a campaign to commemorate all of the airfields that were critical in the defence of the nation. Many airfields are now disused and research by the Trust revealed

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that Wimbledon Common had its own airfield located on The Plain from 1915 to 1918. A formal ceremony was held to unveil a plaque the trust had donated on The Ranger's Office on Wednesday 13th December 2017.

Recent legislative changes to the way in which we deal with personal data has meant that we have had to request that people to sign up to our e-newsletters which provide information on current events and topical information. This has necessitated deleting the details for 800 people who had originally signed up, we now back up to nearly 500 people. Do please sign up and tell your friends/neighbours to sign up, there are forms here this evening for you to complete.

Another important part of the work of the Commons' staff is providing public reassurance and dealing with incidents, particularly those of an anti-social nature. This work is undertaken predominantly by the team of six Mounted Keepers, who undertake daily patrols of the Commons. During the course of the past year our Mounted Keepers have dealt with 1,063 specific incidents, these range from lost children/dogs to rough sleepers. We are now back to full strength with four horses our newest horse Scrumpy has settled into his daily routine very well.

Over 1700 games of rugby were played at the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields as part of the week long Rosslyn Park Rugby 7's tournament held in March, this is the largest junior rugby tournament in the world.

The development of the next generation of staff to maintain these open spaces is really important. Three years ago we took on an apprentice within our Maintenance Team. Having completed various courses at Merrist Wood College, we were pleased to be able to take on the apprentice in a full time capacity earlier in the year. We are currently investigating opportunities to take on another apprentice at the REMPF.

There have been many changes on our Board with the Secretaries of State for the Ministry of Defence and Home Office approving appointments during the past year. We were really pleased the level of interest that both of these positions attracted, demonstrating the commitment and passion that people have for the Commons. Similarly a contested election raised awareness of the Commons locally, with turn out up by 28% from 16.4% in 2015 to 21% in 2018.

Finally, I'd like to thank my very dedicated team of staff whose job it is to maintain the Commons. Without your commitment and enthusiasm the Commons wouldn't be what they are today.

7. Establishing a Friends Group, Sarah-Jane Holden

You would think that an ancient and thriving organisation like our Wimbledon and Putney Commons would have a long established and respected 'Friends' group providing a go to source of funding for one off and or exceptional expenses. Well it doesn't. The subject was under discussion with the previous Board and so this Board of Conservator's, in association with the Ranger's office, is taking the project forward. We are currently formatting a constitution and agreeing a working arrangement with the Ranger's and Keepers to ensure that, when launched, it will become a more formalised alternate source of funding for the Commons.

It will provide an avenue for those users and admirers of the Commons who are not levy payers, and levy payers who want to contribute more towards the enhancement of the Commons, to do so. We hope it will become a community in its own right, and through the events organised, be an additional enjoyable means of supporting the Commons.

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If you wish to express an interest in the Wimbledon and Putney Common Friends, please add your name and email address (neatly written please) to the forms that are around the room. You will automatically become eligible to become a member of the 'First 500' Group.

Thank you and I look forward to announcing the formal launch of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Friends in the near future.

8. Appeals, Dr Ros Taylor

Good evening, the begging role falls to me, Dr Ros Taylor, Defra appointed Conservator. We have a number of appeals we would like to launch during the forthcoming year. The first of these relates to our wildlife garden which is going to be situated close to the Ranger's Office. This is both a partial memorial but it is also about educating and understanding the habitats on the Commons. The idea is to acknowledge Dave Wills, who many of you will know was an important volunteer and the author of many of the Bird Reports for Wimbledon and Putney Commons. He also participated in the Wildlife and Conservation Forum and gave freely of his knowledge and long experience of the Commons and his understanding of its wildlife. The area will include a dipping pond so children can safely study a water environment and will, in miniature, aim to mimic some of the main habitats you can find on the Commons. Our target for that appeal is £20,000.

Also we are launching an appeal for the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields to raise funds for the First World War Memorial. The memorial itself needs repairs, particularly to the base and we have made a bid for that in conjunction with the War Memorials Trust, initially to see if they will help us with a feasibility study.

The final appeal is about a pedestrian walkway beside Beverley Brook. Beverley Brook is on both Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common and the footpath is in great need of restoration for both pedestrians and cyclists. This project will link with another project being carried out by the South East Rivers Trust (SERT), and some of you will have been at the Winter Talk where this was spoken about. The SERT are trying to raise money to extend the work that has already been done in Richmond Park to improve the in-stream environment of the Brook. The Brook is very channelised and the idea is to create a range of habitats to enhance the wildlife in the stream and provide better access down the embankments which are currently quite steep.

Those are our three immediate targets for the immediate future.

9. Call for Volunteers, Peter Hirsch

So far this evening you've been hearing about the Conservators are doing, accounting for how we spend money and look after the Commons in a responsible way, and also you have heard some calls for financial help. I am asking for a different kind of help and that is asking for you to come and offer yourselves to volunteer for us. I am not asking for wellies and waterproofs and to cut down scrub, we already have an excellent team of volunteers for that, with a waiting list, and my thanks to those that help with that. This is more for the office/administration-type work and these are the particular skills that we are looking to call upon from time to time:

- Architect
- Quantity Surveyor
- Landscape Architect

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- Internal Auditor
- Media/PR
- IT
- General lawyers
- Cartographic experts

We are also looking for help with recording/observation of wildlife, biodata and keeping weather diaries. If you are a frequent walker on the Commons this might be something you would be able to help with.

Lastly, another is occasional help supporting visitors at events, meeting and greeting or helping in the Office and perhaps monitoring the car park and helping with survey data to get a better idea of where our visitors come from. We would also very much welcome you helping us if you live outside the levy-paying area. All are welcome.

Even if you can only spare a little time, there may be times when we could use your specialist help. You can speak to any of the Conservators or staff here this evening or contact the Ranger's Office directly if you are able to help in any way. Thank you very much.

10. General Discussion and Questions

Julia Rayburn, Southfields

As I am interested in conservation, I am shocked to find the paperwork printed for the meeting was single-sided. Please could it be done double-sided in future.

In respect to the recent Conservators' election, is there a limit to how much candidates can spend on their campaigns and if so, what is that limit and if there isn't a limit, is it possible one will be set in the future.

The Chairman responded that there had been an error with the printer, and it had been the intention to print double sided. The Chief Executive notified me today to let me know this had happened.

In respect of the election expenses, historically there has been no limit on spending and I mentioned in my talk the recognition to codify and make clear the rules for candidates and we will be looking at that to ensure there is absolute clarity and spending limits will be one of them.

Ewa Cobham, Malcolm Road

I would like to ask a question about the car park near the Windmill. I use the Common regularly but find it difficult to park sometimes. Was there any way of ensuring that people who park there are actually using the Common.

The Chief Executive commented that this was becoming an increasing problem, particularly since the introduction of Controlled Parking Zones in the area. Investigations into powers under the Act that governs the Commons to introduce controlled parking are necessary. We are liaising with local businesses, in particular Parkside Hospital to ask for their help in ensuring their staff do not use the car park. We have introduced a donation scheme but this is an issue that the Board does have to address as those who generally wish to use the Common are becoming disenfranchised. We do recognise the issue and that it has to be dealt with.

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Mrs Cobham asked if it was the Byelaws that did not permit the Commons from charging? What was the situation? The Chief Executive commented that there might be a power under the Byelaws but it was a sensitive issue that needed a lot of consideration.

Mike Housden, Southside

Along Southside Common, there has been an increasing issue of encroachment by cars that park there. That is being dealt with by the Chief Operations Manager but a residual problem is that litter is being spread from these vehicles into the longer grass on the Commons. Is there any possibility of putting notices up?

The Chief Executive commented that if the local community thought that that was something that could help in the short-term period it was something that could be pursued, although a proliferation of signs was to be avoided.

Mr Housden commented that 50% of the Board now comprised candidates that stood as “Common Sense” candidates. Do they act as individuals or do they act en-bloc? The Chairman commented that first and foremost the candidates came together to share resources and raise the profile of the election. They did not have a shared manifesto and treasure their ability to make decisions based on their individual views. We represent a diverse range of backgrounds and that is very positive. Mr Hince commented that each Board member was completely independent and as a Board, do work well and are aligned on most issues but do not vote on en-bloc. Mr Rappolt, as an existing Appointed Conservator, assured Mr Housden there was no en-bloc voting. Mr Hirsch commented that this was one of the issues that had been raised with the Charity Commission and had been strongly rebutted.

Robin Ailes, Kingston Vale

Mr Ailes asked what was being done about the Japanese Knotweed on the Common.

The Chief Executive commented that Japanese Knotweed was very difficult to control, with roots going down at least 6ft and if only a small piece was left after cutting it would grow back. The only way to control in was unfortunately by means of a very specific herbicide and the Commons did have qualified staff to treat it as part of an ongoing regime.

Julia Barker, Cottenham Park Road

Mrs Barker wondered whether, given the damage to the Commons in the 1976 heatwave, what precautions were currently in place during this current heatwave.

The Chief Executive responded that contingency measures were in place and we were in regular contact with the Fire Brigade. It is something we take very seriously given that previous damage. Staff are continually aware and monitoring the Commons.

John Horrocks, Roehampton

Mr Horrocks asked for an update on the Oak Processionary Moth.

The Chief Executive commented that the “steel ring” around London was now lost and there was no way the moth could now be eradicated, it is here to stay and it was now a question of what could be done to keep it under control. He advised that on the Commons a proportionate approach is taken. We have undertaken a risk assessment and identified the priority areas where there was a lot of oak in high use areas. We then employ a company to

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spray the trees in those areas twice a year to control the moths. The nests that develop low in the trees are removed and disposed of, given the hairs that can be an irritant. He stressed the importance for people and dogs to keep away from these nests to prevent irritation. Richmond Park spend some £80,000 a year to deal with OPM but the Commons simply did not have that level of resource. We currently spend up to about £10,000 a year currently. We are going to have to learn to live with the moth and undertake education to raise awareness.

The Chief Executive further commented about the red dots on the trees. When OPM first arrived on the Common we got several grants from the Forestry Commission to undertake some surveys to understand the scale of the problem. As part of that they rather insensitively put these dots on trees that contained nests with permanent marker.

Joe Ruston, Claremont Road

Mr Ruston asked about anti-social behaviour on the Commons, particularly by cyclists and litter, and whether cyclists could be dissuaded from riding their bikes on non-cycling paths.

The Chief Executive commented that the Keepers had been tasked to spend some time focusing on this issue, using the powers under the Byelaws. Prosecuting under the byelaws was not easy and so they were trying to educate and raise awareness. Many of the people stopped simply weren't aware of where they could cycle. The Conservators were aware of the current issues around sustainability and the popularity of cycling but there was a balance to be struck with the need for providing areas for pedestrians too.

A Davies, Inner Park Road

Mr Davies welcomed the plans to restore the footpath along Beverley Brook but commented that the northern end of Ladies Mile became a quagmire during winter and asked if that could be added to the list.

The Chief Executive commented that the Commons needed somewhere in the region of £3m needed to be invested in the Commons. It was hoped to help the executive take this work forward through funding from some of the initiatives already mentioned this evening.

Tony Holroyd, Hook Road

Mr Holroyd asked if he could encourage the Board to look at the volunteer litter picking scheme employed by Richmond Park. The Park is divided up into blocks and volunteers take care of their own particular block, having been issued with all the necessary equipment.

The Chief Executive commented that he supported this initiative and had spoken to the manager at the Park who had explained how helpful he found this resource. He also had the benefit of a volunteer who organised the scheme and the Chief Executive would welcome any volunteer who could step forward and help the Commons organise such a scheme.

Christopher Elliot, Wimbledon

Mr Elliott commented that he had been in touch with the Chief Executive regarding the airfield on the Common that had now been commemorated. He asked if any events were planned to mark the 100th Anniversary of the Air Force.

The Chief Executive commented that an event had been held to commemorate the airfield and it was hoped to plan something later in the year.

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Name not recorded.

Update on the Horse Chestnut Leaf Minor and also, in respect of litter, whether there were any programmes in place to educate younger visitors and whether golfers could help in respect of litter.

The Chief Executive commented that this had been a bad year for the leaf minor, particularly due to the hot weather. Although it didn't kill the tree, it did damage it and leave it vulnerable to other pests/fungus. It was something that was monitored on a regular basis. Several diseases were spreading in the London area and struggling and bio security was a real issue.

Mr Hince commented that issues with litter on the Commons fall into three categories: drinking; dog-waste bags - this was an education issue, perhaps more bins in appropriate locations but making it clear that throwing bags in trees was not appropriate; and finally, tissues and wipes. There needed to be a combination of education and policing to help reduce the problem moving forward.

Roland Kerr, Kingston Vale

Mr Kerr was concerned about the clubs using the Playing Fields over winter as they left a lot of litter around the Playing Fields. Could something be done about this.

The Chief Executive commented that he would ensure this was picked up within the agreements issued to the clubs that use the Richardson Evans memorial Playing Fields.

Name not recorded

A member of the public asked how much the voluntary donation scheme in the car park had raised so far.

The Chairman responded that some £2,000 had been raised up to the end of March.

Mr Andrew Bignold, Kingston Vale

Mr Bignold thanked the Chief Executive and his outstanding staff and the Conservators, and wished the Board every success for a very successful Open meeting.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and brought the meeting to a close at 9.30pm.