



Wimbledon and Putney Commons CONSULTATION ON THE LEVY

This document provides households in the levy-paying area with information about a proposal to change the levy to fund the sustainable management of the Commons.

You have received this document because your household is within the levy-paying area and we are seeking your views. Please read on to learn about our proposal and then respond to this consultation.

About the Commons

Comprising 1,140 acres of open green space, Wimbledon and Putney Commons provide a wilderness to explore, the opportunity to enjoy nature with its health and wellbeing benefits and an open space for exercise and recreation.

The rarity of certain habitats – particularly the ancient heathland – means that around 80% of the Commons were designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1953, making the Commons one of the UK's most important protected landscapes. In 2005, large parts were also made a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in recognition of their internationally important habitats and species. As a result, Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC), the body that owns and manages the Commons, has a duty to protect, conserve and restore the unique mixture of woodland, heathland, grassland and wetland habitats. We want to ensure they continue to thrive for the benefit of current and future generations.

WPCC was created by an Act of Parliament in 1871 and was subsequently registered as a local independent charity.

The Act protects the Commons to ensure that they remain 'open, unenclosed and unbuilt on' so that they can continue to be enjoyed for outdoor recreation and exercise. The charity's trustees (known as Conservators) oversee the management of the Commons, with day-to-day operations carried out by a dedicated team of 25 staff. This unique governance structure was created in 1871 following a dispute between the local community and the then Lord of the Manor, Earl Spencer, who had tried to enclose most of the Commons and sell off the rest for development. A community campaign led to the passing of the Act to preserve the Commons for the public benefit. It placed a small levy on those living close to the Commons to help pay for their upkeep.

Green spaces in London have never been more important. Yet today, with a larger population surrounding the Commons, the charity is facing immense pressures. WPCC is therefore proposing to increase the levy to help meet the current and future challenges facing the Commons.

**We are asking for your views
on this proposal.**



Wimbledon and Putney Commons include Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath, Putney Lower Common and Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields. Visit wpcc.org.uk/nature to find out more about their habitats.

How the Commons are funded

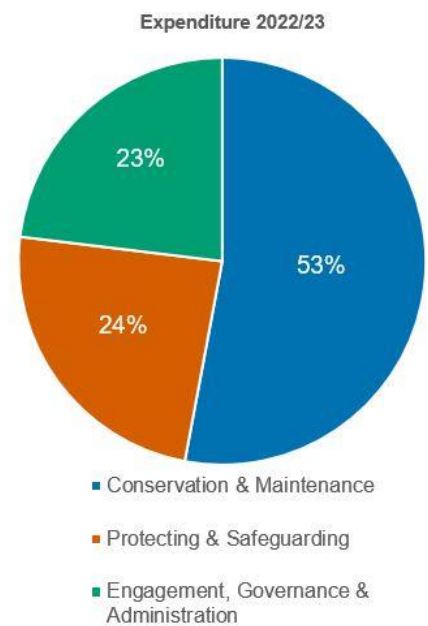
The upkeep of the Commons is mainly funded by a levy on those living in properties within three quarters of a mile of the perimeter of Wimbledon Common, measured by the most direct route along roads or footpaths, or within the old Parish of Putney as it was in 1871. Additional funds are raised through sports, donations and grants, filming, small events, investment income, rental income and commercial licences. The levy is set by the charity but is collected for the charity by the local councils, Wandsworth, Merton and Kingston.

The cost of the levy for each household is determined by the Council Tax Band in which your property falls. For a Band D property, the cost for the 2023/24 financial year is £35.96, which is £3 per month or 69 pence per week. If you receive any exemption or discount to your Council Tax, this will also apply to the levy.

How the charity spends its money

The contributions that levy payers make are spent on the conservation, maintenance and management of the Commons for the benefit of the local community. In 2022/23, the levy raised **£1.3m** of the **£2.2m** cost of managing the Commons.

- **Conservation and Maintenance:** maintaining the internationally important heathland, woodland and grasslands; improving the infrastructure for visitors such as paths, facilities and litter clearing; and maintaining the playing fields and amenity areas
- **Protecting and Safeguarding:** ensuring that the Commons remain safe and pleasant for our visitors; preventing vandalism, encroachment, misuse and damage
- **Engagement, Governance and Administration:** managing communications, fundraising, events and charity governance; processing of licence fees, permits, and leading stakeholder engagement



Why is the levy being reviewed?

WPCC's power to issue a levy is contained in legislation made in 1990. Since 1990, London has seen an increase in population of almost 30% resulting in greater usage of the Commons with an associated increase in maintenance costs. The way in which we have to work has materially changed over recent years with added responsibilities for visitor health and safety, tree and building safety, data protection and charity management.

Since Covid, the community has come to depend more and more on local open spaces. This is welcomed but has increased the wear and tear on the infrastructure and resulted in greater management issues and more litter to manage. In the last year alone, we had to spend £59,000 on waste clearance, almost three times as much as prior to Covid.

The levy has been increased in line with inflation since 1990 but these added pressures mean that this is no longer sufficient to cover the costs of properly maintaining the buildings, paths and car parks, or fully protect the SSSI habitats, and we are having to use our reserves to fund our current operations, which is not sustainable. The playing fields, which are an important source of revenue,

are at capacity and the sports pavilion is desperately in need of investment. With climate change and further population growth likely to cause additional challenges for the SSSI and for maintaining the Commons, we are limited in what we can currently do to prepare for this.

In 2017, WPCC developed the first ever long-term strategy for the Commons. The strategy recognised the need for the development of a Masterplan to identify the long-term investment requirements of the Commons. Funded by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Masterplan has been developed in two stages, with the first stage focussing on the natural environment and the second stage on the built environment. Although most of the one-off costs associated with the Masterplan will need to be funded by external grants and donations, the ongoing costs will have to be met from WPCC's operating budget, which at present is insufficient to fund these needs.

The level of the levy was last reviewed in 1990. WPCC is now proposing to increase the levy to preserve the Commons for current and future generations.

What are we proposing?

We are proposing to increase the levy to raise approximately £375,000 per year in additional income to help secure the long-term future of the Commons' natural environment and facilities. The funds would support the annual costs associated with the Commons' Masterplan, balance WPCC's operating budget, and finance works to buildings and the landscape that have been deferred due to budget constraints.

For a property in Council Tax Band D, the proposed increase would amount to approximately £9.05* per year, which is the equivalent of 75 pence per month or 17 pence per week.

Table A sets out the proposed annual increase for properties in each Council Tax Band. To find out the band of your property, go to: <https://www.gov.uk/council-tax-bands> or alternatively ring the Valuation Office Agency on 03000 501 501 Monday to Friday, 9am to 4:30pm.

If you are not liable to pay Council Tax, then you will not be affected by the proposed increase as you do not pay the levy.

**The proposed increase is in addition to any annual inflationary increase.*

Band	Increase
A	£6.03/year
B	£7.04/year
C	£8.04/year
D	£9.05/year
E	£11.06/year
F	£13.07/year
G	£15.08/year
H	£18.10/year

The difference this additional income would make

An increase in the levy would help us to achieve the projects identified in the Masterplan, such as:

- Improve the paths, rides and cycle routes to facilitate access
- Improve signage and wayfinding to improve the visitor experience
- Manage the woodlands to protect and increase the plants and animals
- Restore wetlands to protect nationally rare species, increase resilience to climate change and help reduce carbon emissions
- Protect and enhance the internationally important heathland
- Improve the ponds and Beverley Brook as valuable habitats for wildlife
- Manage and create wildflower meadows to improve biodiversity

One of our key aims is to improve the condition of the SSSI, which has faced significant pressure in recent decades. Doing this will not only make it better for wildlife, but it will also enhance the Commons' natural beauty so that they remain a wonderful place for you and future generations to visit.

Consideration of alternative sources of income

WPCC manages the charity's finances carefully, working to both increase income and reduce costs. Non-urgent expenditure has been delayed and restraint is exercised with all essential purchases. To increase income, we aim to ensure that all agreements with commercial users of the Commons, such as sporting events, fairs and licences are priced at market value. In addition, we have also employed a fundraiser to help secure grants and donations.

We have considered increased commercialisation such as concerts, open air theatre and festivals, but believe this would not be appropriate for the Commons and visitor feedback indicates this would not be welcomed. We are often asked why we do not charge for car parking. The 1871 Act does not give us an express power to charge for car parking.

In the longer term, WPCC may also explore whether the levy area could be expanded to encompass more properties, however it is anticipated that this would be a lengthy and complex process.

What you've said so far

We have undertaken extensive engagement ahead of this consultation to help shape our proposals. Last year the Conservators engaged an independent consultancy firm to carry out an informal public consultation which tested support for the principle of increasing the levy; there was broad support with 89% of those who responded agreeing that the levy should be increased.

We are now asking for the views of every household in the levy-paying area.

NEXT STEPS AND HOW TO RESPOND

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We would now like your view on our proposal.

How to submit your response:

Responses can be made online or by post.

There is one response per household. If you would like to make additional comments, please use the text box when you respond.

Online – visit: www.bit.ly/levy-consultation (or scan the QR code) and enter the unique code that you will find on the enclosed reply card and submit your response

Reply Card – complete the enclosed reply card, fold, place in the freepost envelope and pop it in a letterbox.

Please note that the code is randomly generated and cannot be used in any way to identify you. You can view our Privacy Statement here: www.wpcc.org.uk/privacy



If possible, please submit your response online as this will significantly reduce our postage costs.

Responses must be received by no later than Sunday 29 October 2023.

Once the consultation period has closed, Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators will consider the responses received and publish a summary on our website.

YOUR QUESTIONS AND HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

We understand that you may have questions that cannot be answered in this document. Please visit our website where you can find a FAQs section that will be kept updated at www.wpcc.org.uk. If you have a question that is not answered there, then please email consultation@wpcc.org.uk.

Opportunities to meet the WPCC team, ask questions and learn more about the levy and consultation will be held in the following locations:

1. **Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 7pm** – Sacred Heart Church Lower Hall, Edge Hill, Wimbledon London SW19 4LU
2. **Tuesday 17 October 2023 at 7pm** - Putney Community Church, Werter Road, Putney SW15 2LL
3. **Thursday 19 October 2023 at 7pm** - Roehampton Holy Trinity Church, Ponsonby Road SW15 4LA
4. **Saturday 21 October 2023 at 5pm** - Online via Zoom. Register here: <https://bit.ly/Levy-Meeting>

Full details of these meetings are also available on the WPCC website at www.wpcc.org.uk



**Wimbledon and
Putney Commons**

CONTACT US

Telephone: 0208 788 7655 Email: consultation@wpcc.org.uk

Interested in learning more about the history of the Commons, the Conservators, and the levy? Please visit: www.wpcc.org.uk/about-us

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