



Wimbledon and Putney Commons

CANDIDATES' ELECTION STATEMENTS

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Election of Conservators 2021

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Susan Bucknall



Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I have always felt very lucky to have Wimbledon Common on my doorstep since moving here eight years ago with my husband, to be near our children and young grandchildren. Every week we have strolled across the Common to enjoy its many delights.

Since March 2020 the Common has taken on a much wider role. It has become a necessity as a daily exercise zone, a chance to wave and smile at friends and family when we could not meet. We have watched the hundreds of people exploring nature, seeing the changing seasons, swans on their nests, young cygnets now fully grown, cyclists, joggers, personal trainers, horse riders and children all gaining from the Common. It has been an absolute necessity for body and soul. I have felt grateful to the earlier Conservators who have looked after this wonderful space and I would feel very privileged to continue their work.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I am a qualified barrister, teacher and Chartered member of the Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). I spent much of my working life in the public and voluntary sectors particularly in community and environmental matters. When I became the Chief Executive of Lawworks I enlarged the profile, scope and success of the charity. I introduced a scheme for community groups, giving them access to free legal help on constitutional and charitable matters.

I was a Local Authority Councillor for 12 years during which I introduced a new committee - Community Services and Environment - working with many of the local groups to improve the environment throughout the district. As Chairman of the Council for three years I worked closely with councillors of all parties.

On retirement I held the post as non-executive director at my local hospital trust until moving to Wimbledon. I currently invigilate at Kings College School.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

The two areas I would like to concentrate on are very different but both extremely important.

The first is to deliver on the challenge that the WPCC Act is revised to become 'fit for purpose' for the future. I should like to use my skills of charity governance to help with this group. A recent retiree, I have the time and energy for this important task.

The second is to work on engaging more of the community to provide volunteering, fundraising and participation opportunities to increase the work such as that done, for example, by the Beverley Brook volunteers (which looks stunning).

I should like to work on the expansion of the education centre by involving local schools. As a councillor I established a much-used Environment Centre. I also set up an Equality and Diversity Committee. I will wish to work on ensuring that the Common is welcoming to all.

Sarah Helen Hawkins



Why do you want to be a Conservator?

Having enjoyed the Commons for the last 15 years with my children and dogs, I have come to realise the importance of stewardship and I am committed to preserving and enhancing this beautiful, but threatened environment for us all and for future generations.

I believe that I could use my experience and skills to encourage greater awareness amongst the general public of the charitable status of the Commons and the issues the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators are facing. I have followed the review into the governance of the WPCC and the Charity Commission's recommendations with interest and would like to work with the other Conservators, the Chief Executive and the dedicated staff of the Commons to implement change and secure future funding.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

My experience with trusts and charities (committee work, events, PR and fundraising) has given me an understanding of the responsibilities of trusteeship, the management of charitable assets, the need for transparency and the necessary legal duties. Locally I have enjoyed working with and for our community, acting at all times with integrity and fairness.

I would anticipate using my communication skills through an open and collaborative approach to increase public awareness, formulate a fundraising programme and develop partnerships which would support and deliver the Board's initiatives.

As an editor and project manager, I have the necessary organisational and decision-making skills and could bring an analytical yet creative approach to the particular challenges facing the Commons post Covid.

I am hardworking and am prepared to invest the time required to make a worthwhile and active contribution to the Board.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

The conservational role of the Board is of utmost importance and sustainability would be the area upon which I would focus. Protecting the Commons' complex ecology and ensuring there is sufficient investment to mitigate increased levels of usage are also vital. In these challenging times the Conservators have a responsibility to grasp new opportunities whilst fulfilling the mission of the 2020 Commons' Strategy and maintaining the Commons' status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation.

To this end, I would encourage the Board to address fundraising and grant application to ensure that current infrastructure is maintained and projects are delivered. Additionally harnessing the fantastic work of volunteers may require more structure. Moreover, there is a need for the Board to focus on the education of the general public and to work with educational providers to promote the WPCC's values.

Peter John Hayes**Why do you want to be a Conservator?**

There is a great diversity of reasons why people value the calm and tranquility of the Commons, whether as individuals, as a family or within team activities.

The Commons is a treasured place for all of us: for walkers, horse riders, running, cycling, golf, football, cricket and rugby and many just simply enjoy the natural heritage of that landscape. We appreciate the excellent work done by the staff, in maintaining the woodland, heathland, scrub, ponds, bogs and recreational areas.

The only upside of Covid19 has been the wonderful increase in users of the Commons for recreation and thus an awareness of it. I was and remain a keen walker and moved to Wimbledon 30 years ago. My family grew up here. I am passionate that the character of The Commons should be sustained, and I

believe that I have experience and expertise to contribute to the Conservators in that role.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

The levy funds the salaries of the staff, but nothing is left for projects. The Masterplan will set out the platform in terms of objectives and practice, but future income needs to be gained to do major activities.

I was Deputy Chairman of The Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, so am conscious of issues of community engagement. I was a Trustee of the Trent Rivers Trust, working on conservation projects with the relevant wildlife trusts. I was on the Board and Chairman of Sheffield Assay Office, so am familiar with issues of strategy and governance.

Of relevance to some parallel physical challenges for the Commons, I had a farm and was President in 2014 of Hope Sheep Dog Trials and Agricultural Society. This is over 150 years old and is currently the only agricultural show in the Peak District National Park and is run entirely by volunteers on its own land.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

After a progressive growth in activities, education, events and reports up to 2019, the incidence of COVID in 2020/early 2021, has delayed things and stretched staff and management.

When feasible, in the short-term:

- Reactivate the suspended activities previously done but, cancelled/postponed by Covid19.
- Appoint a new CEO and support the staff in carrying out the operations for 2021.
- Work on the celebrations for the 150th anniversary in August 2021.

In longer term, address:

- Embrace the Masterplan consultations and set specific, identifying project-based schemes for the new pavilion and noted buildings which would attract specific and functional grant making bodies..
- Further develop other funding sources, where unrestricted funding can be made available to match future grants.
- Review changes to the Constitution, but this would have a medium term impact.

David Hince**Why do you want to be a Conservator?**

As a current Conservator I have had the privilege of understanding first hand the impact a Conservator can have on both the immediate and long-term future of the Commons.

I care passionately about the Commons, and wish to see it preserved so that future generations can also enjoy all its many wonders. This includes adapting to the demands of the ever-increasing footfall, whilst also protecting and preserving this complex but wonderful natural environment.

I have had the pleasure of being able to use the Commons almost every day for the last 15 years, either through dog walking, cycling or running, as a result of which I've become immensely fond of it. Litter is a big bugbear of mine, so I regularly wander around in true 'Womble' fashion with a litter picker and black bags.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

Rather like peeling an onion, it takes a lot of time and effort to unravel all the complexities of being a Conservator and Trustee and, now that I have, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to continue in this role. I have served on four sub-committees, equating to roughly 100 meetings in the last three years.

On a daily basis, I have enjoyed chatting to people on the Commons, hearing their views, concerns and ideas, and, where appropriate, I have fed these back to our amazing staff and the Board.

I am retired after a career in the army and then finance, so I now have both the time and energy to dedicate to the role. I also have a sound understanding of what it takes to build and run successful teams, in highly regulated environments: all skills that I drew upon whilst serving as a Trustee.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

I sincerely hope the new Board can build upon the work of the last three years, progress the numerous public consultations and develop both the Master Plan and the Constitutional Review. This will ultimately lead to the much-needed changes in governance, finance and capital investment.

There are some hard, and potentially uncomfortable, decisions future boards are going to have to address in order to ensure we have the required finances to maintain our amazing Commons. We need to raise our long-term revenue perhaps via amending the levy or charging for car parking, both of which would require public consultations, MP support and, ultimately, parliamentary approval.

I would also like to see increased communication with levy payers, so that we can collectively understand the future demands and challenges that face our Commons, and work together to address these.

Peter Denis Hirsch**Why do you want to be a Conservator?**

I love our beautiful Commons but they are a fragile space. I seek your trust again to continue as a WPCC Conservator to continue to support, preserve and enhance them. My family and I moved to Wimbledon 38 years ago to be near this wonderful green space. My wife, our children and young grandchildren and I all enjoy walking, running, photographing nature, playing and just relaxing there.

I was first elected Conservator in 2018 when the Board inherited significant problems. In this 3-year term, we took huge strides in solving many of these difficulties. I am proud of our achievements, as recognised for example by our regulator the Charity Commission which acknowledged great improvements in our managing of the Commons.

Looking to the future, I promise, if elected, to give my all to focus on the core job; preserving and enhancing our precious Commons.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I am an experienced manager and non-executive director with a background in earth science, management consultancy and academic lecturing. I have expertise in understanding organisations and helping them improve.

WPCC's organisation is small but relatively complex; my skills have made an important contribution to the WPCC Board and will continue to be needed in future.

I have chaired our local Resident's Association, covering eleven roads in Wimbledon for the last ten years. I am well known in the community, and residents often talk to me about what they expect of the Commons.

Now we have made significant progress with the previous governance and other difficulties, I will work to ensure that the Commons Management focus on preserving and enhancing this extraordinary but fragile natural environment for us and future generations.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

I want to drive further conservation and improvement of the Common's physical space without compromising its precious, unspoilt, wild state. However, to do this we must also:

- overcome the stress from COVID-19, both physically and financially
- continue the good work of the present Board especially strengthening the governance and finances of the Commons

I will work with enthusiasm to implement our strategies and plans. This means explaining our actions openly and honestly, listening to the local community and other users, and communicating back to them and the Board regularly.

Lastly, if elected, I will play my part to ensure that the Board lives up to its own values in the way it does its work. I promise to do my best as a Board member to continue our good work improving the Commons.

Simon Joseph PB Hood**Why do you want to be a Conservator?**

To be an Ambassador for the best green space in town.

It is a privilege to live less than 5 minutes' walk from these magnificent Commons & to pay relatively little for it. As a walker I am determined to preserve their future.

In the tradition of my grandfather Sir Joseph Hood the philanthropist I am passionate about local issues. I am Deputy Chair of DHG a campaign group to "Save Dorset Hall "a Grade II listed building in Merton, home of suffragette Rose Lamartine Yates. It has fallen into disrepair. The Commons were a platform for their Cause. I am also involved in fund raising for the Wimbledon Museum.

To achieve value for money for levy payers.

My experience in financial services, fund raising, community charity work and as an Expert Witness will provide the Commons Board with sound, independent, impartial advice and judgement.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

Financial Management Skills: 40 years' experience in the financial services industry. I bring financial management and analytical disciplines to the role.

Fund Raising Skills: I have managed many complex fund-raising operations both commercial and for the charity sector. Useful skills for grant applications and for other fund-raising activities.

Legal Experience Skills: Extensive experience of reading and analysing complex contracts. I have acted as an Expert Witness in the High Court. This skill would be helpful in reviewing proposed Constitution amendments.

Due Diligence Skills: Extensive due diligence experience working with financing parties, grant giving bodies & charitable foundations. This will be critical in reviewing strategy reports, specialist contractor contracts and ensuring successful implementation of new projects.

Conflicts of Interest Experience: I have substantial experience of governance & conflicts of interest issues.

These skills provide independent, impartial & balanced judgement.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

COVID Impact: Review of how to best deal with challenges of increased footfall & its impact on parking, litter, wildlife preservation, local residents and loss of revenue

Appointment new CEO -key appointment

Changes to the Constitution & Review of the Levy area and the levy increase - critical for future funding

Masterplan for the Future of the Commons: next stage implementation. Framework for the future.

Public Consultation process of the Masterplan: address local views

Funding of the Pavilion: fund the infrastructure

Address Financing gap between revenue & expenditure: long term financial viability

Decision on 150th year Anniversary celebrations: imminent decision necessary

Increase numbers of Friends of the Commons: important for additional revenue & local commitment

Review heritage aspects of the Commons strategy: underemphasised

Set new short- and medium-term strategy objectives: good management

Continue to improve Communication objectives with Stakeholder groups: listen to the users

Michael Frederick Johnston



Why do you want to be a Conservator?

My family and I are lucky to live 100 yards from the Commons. We are therefore able to experience the joy they bring to hundreds of people, every day; they are, in fact, the reason we moved to Wimbledon. This is only possible because of the vision of the conservators and the excellent way in which the Commons are managed. I believe I have the skills and knowledge to help continue to enhance the Commons' beauty and protect them as a green space; a true rarity in London. The Commons not only support wonderful flora and fauna but also bolster the mental and physical health of all users; an imperative at present. Preserving and enhancing them requires conservators with the sort of experience and expertise I possess. As an early retiree, I have the time and energy to help the team protect the Commons for the benefit of all.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have 20 years experience of sitting on charity boards, particularly in the environment sector. This has given me deep insight into charity governance, finance and strategic development. On a personal level, I have a passion for wildlife and nature conservation; key issues shaping the Commons' future. I have just completed a nine year term as a trustee of Butterfly Conservation, a leading UK environment charity, as well as time as a Scottish Wildlife Trust board member. Over the past two decades, I have sat on a wide range of charity and not for profit company boards across the arts, health, business and the urban environment while at the same time working at the top level of management in the media sector where I began as a journalist. With this experience, I will make a strong and effective conservator.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

The Commons are for everybody and must be managed for the benefit of all. After a period of financial insecurity, the conservators have put them on a stable footing. It is now time for the new conservators to build on this and develop a strategy that shows a clear vision of the Commons' future. This must demonstrate a strengthened approach to conservation and protection of the unique flora and fauna including active management of those parts that are recognised as areas of outstanding scientific interest; the restoration of heathland is a great step forward but there is still much to do. This must be balanced with a commitment that keeps the Commons open to all. By maintaining and improving existing access, the board will ensure they remain places of joy for all Londoners.

Diane Kathryn NEIL MILLS



Why do you want to be a Conservator?

It was an honour to be elected in 2018 as a Conservator and an even greater privilege to serve as Chairman. The role has allowed me to appreciate the uniqueness of Wimbledon and Putney Commons in terms of how they are governed, managed and financed.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of this unique resource for the purposes of recreation and exercise, as established in the 1871 Act. Even more than this, however, the Commons have become a spiritual lifeline for the entire community. But COVID has also highlighted their fragility and the critical need to preserve, protect and invest in the Commons to serve both current and future generations.

We have made important strides in the past three years but there is much still to be done. I would be grateful for the opportunity to continue the work that will allow us to achieve this goal.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

As a runner, cyclist, outdoors enthusiast, parent, long-time Wimbledon resident and current Conservator, I understand the needs of the local community and the way in which these needs may best be met.

I have an extensive background in local government, serving for eight years as a Councillor for Merton Council. This has provided me with a good understanding of policy development, long-term investment planning and the importance of strong community engagement. I also have previous experience as a Conservator for Mitcham Common and a Trustee of the Wandle Valley Regional Park, both of which provided useful lessons in approaches to effective governance.

My formal training is in engineering and economics. These skills, together with practical experience in regulatory affairs and business development, have also proven helpful to me in supporting the management to achieve high standards in the operation of the Commons.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

- 150th Anniversary and Volunteering - The 16th August 2021 marks the 150th anniversary of the Commons and this important milestone will be a cause for collective celebration, led by the recently established Friends' Group. Volunteering is another important form of community engagement and there are opportunities to further increase the level of involvement of the local community.
- Targeted Investment - The wild and rugged character of the Commons is cherished by all yet there is a need for targeted investment in certain areas, as the recently completed Beverley Brook works demonstrate. Improvements to

the Richardson Evans pavilion, shared-use paths and public toilet facilities could similarly be delivered by working with partners and leveraging public goodwill.

- Resilience - With improvements in governance in place and a masterplan in development, there is now a need to focus on bolstering the organisation's financial capacity (levy and donations) and clarifying the constitutional framework to provide long-term resilience.

Selma Rauf



Why do you want to be a Conservator?

Passionate and committed about preserving nature, I am a regular walker and have lived on the Heath for over thirty five years. I would love to play an active role in protecting the Heath and the Commons and at the same time creating opportunities for people to enjoy the green spaces.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I am a very approachable individual with a successful career in law (practising solicitor) and teaching. I have excellent communication skills and am willing to address the issues facing the Commons by listening carefully and giving my views in a constructive way. I have a strong sense of responsibility and follow processes and procedures.

I worked as a Trustee for the GreenSeas Trust and, presently, as a London coordinator for the Animals Asia Foundation, I am aware of how charities and fundraising work.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

2020 saw an enormous increase of activity on the Common. I see this as positive but it has put a lot of pressure on the flora and fauna. I would like to see the Commons regenerated by creating and implementing policies which are beneficial for both the public and the wildlife.

Donald James Roy



Why do you want to be a Conservator?

I have lived within the levy-paying area for more than fifty years. The Commons and Heath have changed considerably in that time - accommodating the movement of mammals such as badgers and foxes. They remain a large part of the lungs of the local community - their importance highlighted by the current pandemic and the responses to it. They are of particular value to families who lack sufficient space - especially green space - many of whom live within a short walking distance of them.

The Conservators form a long established body which should continue but undergo enough change and development to enable it to work better while keeping its essential character and values. This will not be easy given the various difficulties that have occurred in the last thirty odd years. However I have encountered similar problems in other contexts.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

Between 1994 and its abolition by statute in late 2003 I was a member of Wandsworth Community Health Council - serving as Chair thereof from 1997 onwards. Between 2008 and 2018 I was a Trustee of Wandsworth Care Alliance - serving as Chair thereof until 2014. From February 2018 to January 2021 I have been a member of the Council of Governors of St. George's University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. Between 2012 and 2018 I served on the Management Committee of the Roehampton Forum - serving as Secretary thereof until 2016. Two out of the four were or are statutory bodies and a third a charity while the last, although an unincorporated association, aspired towards charitable status.

Serving as a Chair or Secretary over time requires considerable skills - not to mention goodwill and patience. Understanding colleagues, issues, procedure and the purpose of the organisation are not just desirable but essential.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

It will have to keep the confidence of local communities. So it will need to be seen as caring, competent and honest - as some previous Boards do not appear to have been.

It develops a reputation for stewardship that balances local desire for access and amenity with wider ecological and environmental needs.

It achieves a change to its byelaws that enables it to borrow for capital spending from the Public Works Loans Board. This would fulfil its duty to keep buildings safe in an affordable and sustainable way.

It makes good use of the opportunity presented by its 150th anniversary to display its achievements over the years and indicate what it can contribute locally and more widely in the future.

It achieves and sustains strong relationships with the three local authorities where levy-payers reside so as to avoid any repetition of the highly unsatisfactory situation around 1990.

Syeda Zainab Vaqar**Why do you want to be a Conservator?**

I believe when people come together they can overcome difficult challenges; the challenge in this case being the climate change. I want to do my part as a conservator to help turn the tide in creating a planet with stable climate, safe water, clean air, greener transport and more plant based food. Let us start right here at our own Commons and create a future, which is better for us and the generations to come! I want to lend a hand in improving the area that is home to me; being in nature, especially in the Commons which is in the middle of the city, yet far from its hustles, feels right at home! Lets preserve and protect this wonderful asset. I am here and I care!

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

- I have a love for nature, which was, instilled in me from early childhood by a family keen in gardening and poetry; "To the Cuckoo" by Keats is one my favourites, Wordsworth and Robert Frost shaped my early experiences and imagination
- After completing my MBA degree I worked for non profit, charitable organization
- My first job was a banker then switched to teaching "Critical Thinking" was with special emphasis on outdoor activities
- I try to recycle all my used products and believe in up-cycling and take keen interest in various researches to tackle waste and environment
- I support ventures to protect endangered species, leading me to adopt a Snow Leopard with WWF
- I also support the Greenpeace
- I understand the value of team working

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

- The board should engage more with the community and utilize the social media to educate them about the importance and beauty of the Commons, ensuring its long term existence and fostering a sense of community
- Activities for children to learn about animals and natural resources hence jumpstarting love for nature so they become advocates of biodiversity, enabling them to lead an ecologically balanced life from early, while developing love for this space
- Hold events at the Commons to showcase the best within the commons
- Encourage people to exercise more to deal with prevailing mental health issues
- Teach people the importance of preserving and protecting our commons hence maintaining its character and amenities for the long run
- Make our Commons inclusive and fun
- Do fund raising to invest in this green treasure so it grows and thrives

Simon Jonathan Withey**Why do you want to be a Conservator?**

I am virtually a daily user of Wimbledon Common and have been since 1985, it was my family's back garden and outdoor space when they were growing up and as a result I have great personal affection for the Common. I value the peace and tranquillity it brings me and this is particularly relevant in these current difficult and troubled times. I would very much want to preserve and enhance this wonderful green asset for future generations and play an active part in doing so.

What experience and skills do you feel you could bring to the role?

I have run my own companies for over 30 years and still continue to do so and as a result have built up a great deal of business experience both financially and practically. I am a passionate believer in education and in enhancing the positive outcomes of young people. I have been a school governor in Merton for many years at a number of local authority schools in different parts of the Borough and have been Chair of Governors of four of them. I am currently Vice Chair of Governors at Rutlish Boys School in Merton Park and also sit on the joint Sixth Form Board of Ricards Lodge and Rutlish School. I am a Trustee of The Rutlish Foundation a charity which supports the education needs of young people in Merton. I have also been a Councillor in the London Borough of Merton for 8 years.

What are the most important things you would like the new board to achieve during its term of office and why?

I would like the board to achieve a legacy of a net biodiversity gain, to become as an organisation carbon neutral in the way we act and operate, to be visionary and sustainable, actively engaging with multiple stakeholders, particularly schools. Encouraging pupils and young people to participate on potential joint educational projects so as to better understand the effects on our local environment and particularly the Common of climate change. To protect the Commons from undue and unnecessary development and enhance and nurture the natural fauna and flora that grows there.