



## Wimbledon and Putney Commons

### Media Statement May 2021

#### **Board of Conservators**

Following WPCC's triennial election in March 2021, the two newly elected and three re-elected Conservators, along with the three appointed Conservators, held their first Board meeting on Monday 12 April 2021. Diane Neil Mills was elected as Chairman for the ensuing year.

#### **Home Office Appointed Conservator**

The Board welcomed the confirmation of the reappointment of Mr Nigel Ware as the Home Office appointed Conservator for a second three-year period commencing 14 March 2021. Mr Ware's considerable high-level financial experience has been an asset to the Board and throughout his first term he has chaired WPCC's Finance and Investment Committee. In this capacity, Mr Ware has been instrumental in introducing significant improvements to the budgeting and accounting processes.

#### **Annual Open Meeting**

In accordance with the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871, the Annual Open Meeting of the Conservators at which the Annual Report and Accounts are presented to levy-payers will be held on Wednesday 30 June 2021.

Although it had been hoped to hold a physical meeting this year, given the risks inherent in holding a large indoor meeting so soon after the proposed ending of the legal limits on social contact (21 June 2021), the Conservators agreed to once again hold this year's meeting by means of a Zoom Webinar.

#### **150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Games Day**

On 15 August 2021, the Conservators will be hosting a celebration of the games and sporting activities that have been played on the Commons over the last 150 years. The celebration will include games of cricket, rugby, football, running, hockey, riding, cycling, bowls and tennis, all of which have historic links with the Commons. Further details will be available on the Conservators' website over the next few months.

#### **Board Approves Body Worn Cameras for Mounted Keepers**

Over the last few months, the Mounted Keepers have been trialling the use of body worn cameras whilst out on patrol on the Commons. The Keepers' role is varied but from time to time may involve being called to assist the police in apprehending criminals. In addition, they are unfortunately on occasion subject to verbal or physical abuse by members of the public for a variety of reasons, often due to alcohol/drug abuse. They work alone and often have to face very challenging situations, such as those involving large groups of people under the influence of alcohol. Experience suggests that the cameras deter individuals who otherwise

may see a person in uniform as a target for abuse. In addition, in an ever increasingly litigious world, the importance of being able to produce accurate, transparent, real time records of events is essential to protect the integrity of the organisation, the individuals employed to protect the Commons and those who visit this special open space. Visitors are assured that they will be advised by the Keepers if they intend to record a conversation with them.

### **Gatherings on the Commons**

The recent gatherings involving large numbers of people engaging in antisocial behaviour in the Rushmere area are of great concern to the Conservators. One such gathering, on 1 April 2021, involved an estimated 500 people; since then, gatherings of around 100 to 150 people have moved further into the Commons and have caused some damage to sensitive areas, particularly around Bluegate Pond.

The police have attended regularly and provided support to our Keepers; we are grateful to the police for their assistance. Along with concerns regarding under-age drinking, the rubbish that is left behind, such as empty bottles and other detritus in and around the ponds, is potentially dangerous to our wildlife particularly as it is currently nesting season. In breach of our byelaws, fires are being lit which, as the warmer drier air arrives, will increasingly present a risk of becoming out of control and causing devastating damage to the nearby heathland.

### **Governance**

The Resolutions of the meetings of the Board of Conservators held on [12 April 2021](#) and [19 April 2021](#) have been posted on the Wimbledon and Putney Commons website.

ENDS

NOTES for Editors - Wimbledon and Putney Commons is a charity managed by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC). It was established under the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871. The Commons comprise some 1,140 acres across Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Common.

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