



MEDIA RELEASE

MAY 2020

COVID-19

The critical role served by open spaces such as Wimbledon and Putney Commons for the pursuit of outdoor exercise has been widely recognised during this crisis and the Conservators consider it an honour to be part of an organisation upon whom the responsibility for providing such an essential service is bestowed.

Keeping this unique resource accessible to all is therefore of vital importance. To that end, in responding to the risks and challenges presented by the pandemic, we have followed both government guidance and scientific evidence regarding practices and restrictions affecting open spaces and taken every decision on the basis of supporting the national effort to save lives.

Some of the measures that we have taken over the past five weeks would have been unimaginable even a few weeks ago and we fully appreciate the impact of these measures on the local community in particular. Any one of the measures that we have had to introduce would under normal circumstances have been taken only following full public consultation and deliberation by the Conservators. We are however in unprecedented times and have been forced to respond to the emerging crisis in very compressed timescales whilst operating in a very dynamic environment.

The approach that we have taken to enforcement of the restrictions is one of education rather than imposition of harsh penalties. The sooner the transmission is brought under control, the sooner we will be able to begin easing restrictions. We all therefore bear collective responsibility for following these guidelines. Although most people are extremely supportive and compliant of these restrictions, for some, there is a mistaken understanding that the regulations and byelaws governing the Commons have been suspended whilst it is the very opposite that is true.

During these unprecedented times, we are reminded of how fortunate we all are to have this uniquely wonderful resource which represents one of the few remaining vestiges of a normal world. To some, it is a lifeline and we are therefore grateful for the support of our staff, whose dedication and selflessness allows us to continue to access these open spaces. We do however simply ask that during these very difficult times, members of the public support the measures that we have put in place.

WPCC Access Framework

A major focus for the Board over the past two years has been the development of WPCC's Access Framework. The Framework has been developed to ensure that requests for access to the Commons are considered in a comprehensive, consistent and structured manner that respects the duties, powers and prohibitions that govern Wimbledon and Putney Commons. Conservators approved the draft Access Framework in February 2019 and following legal review, consultation with key external parties and final consideration by the Board at its April 2020 meeting, it has now been published on the website; a copy can be downloaded [here](#).

The Access Framework sets out the three fundamental criteria against which requests for access to the Commons will be considered:

- compatibility with WPCC's charitable purposes of recreation and exercise;
- physical impact on the landscape;
- level of interference with other users.

If a request meets these criteria, written authorisation may or may not be required and if so, the appropriate form that such agreement takes will be agreed. Any agreement will comply with the appropriate charity law.

Update on Wimbledon and Putney Commons National Lottery Heritage Grant Award

Although considerable progress had been made on the 'Commons for the Next Generation, Green Space for All' project to develop a new masterplan for the Commons, the work is currently suspended as a result of COVID-19. The National Lottery Heritage Fund has agreed to extend the deadline for the project until the end of 2020.

Update on Constitutional Reform

In December 2019, WPCC announced its decision to undertake a consultation process to consider potential amendments to its constitution. Although it had been intended to commence the first phase of the consultation process in Spring 2020, the Board agreed at its meeting on 6 April 2020 to suspend the process due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Further details of the constitutional amendment process may be found [here](#))

Information Request

In November 2018, WPCC reported through its [Media Release](#) that a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 had been received from a levy-payer in respect of the exchange of use of land between WPCC and the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club that had been agreed in 1979, enabling the Conservators serving at the time to build a maintenance centre. Having considered the matter, on the 12th May 2020 the Information Commissioner issued a Decision Notice supporting WPCC's position, a copy of which may be found [here](#).

Governance

The [Resolutions](#) of the meeting of the Board of Conservators held on the 6th April 2020 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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