

Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC)
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MEDIA RELEASE
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Update on Wimbledon and Putney Commons National Lottery Heritage Grant Award and on the Constitutional Framework

The 'Commons for the Next Generation, Green Space for All' project to develop a new masterplan for the Commons was officially launched on the 1st November 2019. Funded by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project will enable work to be undertaken to better understand the challenges and requirements of the Commons as the 150th anniversary of the passing of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 ('the 1871 Act') that brought the Commons into public ownership approaches.

Working with the highly regarded cultural consultancy firm Barker Langham, the first stage of the public engagement strategy is designed to provide a better understanding of the profile, purpose of visit and user-experience of current visitors to the Commons as well as an understanding of the barriers faced by those who do not visit the Commons.

In support of this stage of the project, Barker Langham will conduct two surveys:

On-site Survey - Over four days between December 2019 and mid-January 2020, researchers will be on the Commons conducting face to face interviews with current users.

Self-selecting Online Survey – This survey will be conducted during December 2019 and January 2020, distributed through WPCC's existing mailing lists and other relevant channels targeting both current users of the Commons and audiences who are not currently using the Commons.

Another key part of the project involves an assessment carried out by landscape architects of the quality of the natural landscape of the Commons, recognising the importance of the site's special designations by Natural England for its rare heathland and associated fauna.

In addition, an assessment of the built heritage will be carried out identifying the significance of buildings and structures in terms of their historic importance, setting and vulnerability. Initially this work will focus on the Statutory Listed buildings and structures, including the windmill, war memorials and other structures, followed by an assessment of the other buildings including those within the windmill enclosure and the residential lodges.

In recognition of the need to address issues in key operational buildings, the Conservators have agreed to extend the scope of the investigations to include a detailed feasibility study of the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Field Pavilion. This important community facility, the oldest section of which was constructed in the early 1930s, is in need of significant investment. To carry out this study, Barker Langham is working with an award winning RIBA chartered architectural practice to undertake a full review of the current state of the building. A full feasibility study and concept design involving current users will be undertaken to develop a clear strategy for significantly upgrading the existing facility.

Implementation of the masterplan will require sustainable financial capacity, operational clarity and effective governance. In pursuit of these objectives, the Conservators have over the course of the past 18 months, begun to examine the constitutional amendments necessary to provide this resilience.

The exploratory work in this area has been carried out by the charity's Constitution Working Group, the terms of reference for which provide clarity of scope and purpose:

"The purpose of the Group is to consider amendments necessary to WPCC's constitutional framework that will enhance WPCC's ability to achieve its fundamental

purpose of preserving, protecting and enhancing the Commons for the purposes of exercise and recreation as established by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871.”

“Constitutional reform is not about introducing a more permissive regime or diluting the fundamental purposes of the charity, but about introducing a workable set of rules to enable the organisation to fulfil its core objectives.”

The exploratory work has helped identify the key areas requiring change and the procedures through which such change could potentially be effected. The Conservators therefore resolved at their Board meeting of the 2nd December 2019 to commence a phased consultation to understand the views of stakeholders regarding potential amendments to WPCC’s constitutional framework in the following three areas:

1. Potential amendment of WPCC’s Special Levy, recognising that:
 - i. a founding principle of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 Act is that the Levy is intended to serve as the principal source of funding to maintain the Commons; and
 - ii. the Levy is currently insufficient to meet the long term maintenance and investment requirements for the Commons;
2. Regularisation and clarification of land and building matters enabling WPCC to resolve a number of operational matters associated with managing the Commons, recognising that there is neither a desire nor intention of diluting or diminishing the very high level of protection that is afforded by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act 1871 to one of the most unique and precious resources in the country but simply a need to ensure that the Act provides a sound legal basis for future investment in all aspects of the Commons; amendments to address the issues in this area would neither impact WPCC’s charitable objects nor diminish the duties imposed upon the Conservators but regularise the current state of the estate and clarify the Conservators’ powers and prohibitions in this area;
3. Modernisation of WPCC’s governance arrangements and election procedures recognising the practical challenges of working under legislation dating back to the founding legislation of 1871.

The primary means of effecting changes to WPCC’s constitution will be through secondary legislation.

Consultation on proposed changes to WPCC’s Constitution

The Board has agreed that the consultation will be carried out on a phased basis, moving from preliminaries to concepts and principles before starting to formulate specific policies. The first phase of the consultation process will commence in February 2020 and it is anticipated that the consultation process will last until at least the end of June 2020. The Conservators have also agreed that any decision to make a formal application for constitutional reform to the relevant authorities will only be contemplated after the proposed changes have undergone public consultation.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of the Commons, the Conservators, as stewards of this cherished open space, want to ensure that all those with a passion and interest in the Commons are able to contribute to not only the long-term vision and masterplan for the Commons but to the constitutional reforms necessary to deliver that vision. More information on the consultation and engagement work will be published as the project evolves. Please do sign up to the Commons e-newsletter [here](#) to find out more.

Governance

The [Resolutions](#) of the meeting of the Board of Conservators held on the 2nd December 2019 have been posted on the Wimbledon and Putney Commons website. There are further Resolutions from the December 2019 Board meeting that will be released after the General Election on the 12th December 2019.

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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