



**Wimbledon  
and Putney  
Commons**

## **Media Statement December/January 2021**

### **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Levy 2022/2023**

A founding principle of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871 is that the Commons are principally financed by a dedicated levy on residential properties that “primarily benefit” from the Commons, defined by the Act as all those within three-quarters of a mile of Wimbledon Common (including Putney Heath) or within the Parish of Putney as it existed in 1871.

The levy area extends across three local authorities (Wandsworth, Merton and Kingston) to whom responsibility for billing and collecting the levy was transferred in 1990 from WPCC. The levy appears as a separate charge on the annual Council Tax statements of the relevant properties.

Secondary legislation that was introduced when these arrangements were put in place in 1990 established a limit for the aggregate levy, adjusted annually to reflect inflation as measured by the Retail Prices Index (RPI).

Given the continued pressure on operating budgets, the Board agreed in December 2020 to set the levy each year at the maximum level until 2026/27. In accordance with this policy, the Board, at its 13 December 2021 meeting, set the aggregate levy for 2022/23 at £1,323,328, generating an additional £61,320 to support the work of the Charity. The cost per property will not be known until mid-January 2021 when the three Councils determine the number of relevant properties within the levy area.

### **Saving Wimbledon Commons’ Wetland Habitats**

A 2021 assessment of the mires on the Commons has revealed that this important habitat has faced a dramatic decline over the past 30 or so years due to the loss of water and the associated colonisation of invasive species. As a result, large parts of the peat bogs have been lost and the remaining areas are in decline, releasing carbon into the atmosphere.

Farm bog on Wimbledon Common, once one of the largest peat bogs found in London, has shrunk by over 60% in size since the 1950s. A number of the rare wetland species have become extinct on the site. In recognition of the need to address this situation, the Board agreed at its recent meeting to support an ambitious restoration project of the rare valley mire wetland habitats on the Commons.

Led by the Commons’ Wildlife and Conservation Forum, a team will work with local partners such as the South East Rivers Trust and the London Wildlife Trust to start to reverse this decline by restoring the four valley mire sites on the Common. As well as saving this habitat for rare species of bog plants, the project will make a contribution towards mitigating climate change by storing carbon. With a greater retention of water in peat deposits and soils, these areas and the associated mires and wet woodland will also have a greater resilience to extreme climatic fluctuations such as droughts.

Further details of this exciting project can be found on the WPCC website [here](#)

## **Dog Walking Licences**

In accordance with the Commons' Byelaws, the Conservators have, for many years, run a scheme whereby a limited number of dog-walkers have been licenced to walk up to six dogs, rather than the normal limit of four.

At the Board meeting on 13 December 2021, the Conservators agreed that this scheme will come to an end in 2022 and all dog-walkers on the Commons, whether commercial or private, will be bound by the Byelaw that permits a maximum of four dogs in any one group.

There are several reasons for this decision. Since the start of COVID19 there has been a marked increase in the number of dogs on the Commons and the Conservators are increasingly concerned about the impact that dogs have on wildlife through disturbance and eutrophication (when the environment becomes enriched with nutrients) – particularly as the Commons has a Site of Special Scientific Interest designation for its nationally important habitats that require nutritionally-poor soil quality.

In addition there are operational difficulties for the Keepers in policing the scheme and the potentially confusing message it sends to others regarding the maximum number of dogs that are permitted to be walked together.

Finally, the policies of adjacent landowners – Wandsworth and Merton Councils – have been taken into account as well as guidance from dog/animal welfare charities, which supports the lower limit.

The Conservators recognise the impact that the policy will have on the parties operating under the current licensing arrangements and have therefore agreed that licences issued this year will run until their expiry date of 31 October 2022. In taking the decision, however, the Conservators believe that the new policy is in the best interests of both the Commons and the welfare of dogs.

## **Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons**

The Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons are delighted to announce that the postponed 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration event – Champagne Reception and Afternoon Tea at the All England Lawn Tennis Club – will take place on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

The event is open to all and tickets are available at a cost of £30 plus booking fee from Eventbrite:

[Champagne Reception and Afternoon Tea at the AELTC](#)

## **Thames Hare and Hounds**

The Conservators were delighted to hear that Thames Hare and Hounds have been awarded a World Athletics Heritage Plaque in recognition of their key role in the development of cross country running. Thames Hare and Hounds is the oldest adult cross country club in the world. The club has been running on Wimbledon Common since 1868 and has its base on the Common, at the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields. The accolade is a great tribute to both the Thames Hare and Hounds and the Commons, considered by some to be some of the finest terrain for cross country running in the world.

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## Meetings

**Board Meetings** - Following the decision by the Board to hold the non-confidential part of their Board meetings in public, two such meetings have been held: the first on 11 October 2021 at the Wimbledon Common Golf Club and the second on 13 December 2021 (by Zoom due to increased concerns about the pandemic) with members of the public in attendance at both meetings.

Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings and raise questions or issues in relation to the subjects discussed at the meeting. Details regarding future meetings will be posted on WPCC's website.

**General Open Meeting** – The Board held a successful General Open Meeting at the London Scottish Golf Club on 29 November 2021. Traditionally this meeting focuses on operational issues around managing the Commons as well as having a guest speaker. This year's speaker was the Commons' Maintenance Manager, Jack Rowland, who provided the audience with an insight into the wide-ranging work that he and his team carry out.

Approximately 40 members of the public attended the meeting and raised a variety of questions. A copy of the draft notes of the meeting are available on the website [here](#).

## Governance

The recent Resolutions of the meetings of the Board of Conservators are now available on the website:

[11 October 2021](#)

[13 December 2021](#)

## Declarations of Interest

WPCC fully supports the principles of transparency and openness and is committed to furthering these objectives whenever possible. The Board has therefore unanimously agreed to publish the Conservators' Declarations of Interest, which may be found on the website [here](#)

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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