



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**JUNE 2020**

### **COVID-19**

At its 8 June 2020 meeting, the Board of Conservators acknowledged and thanked the staff for their relentless and selfless commitment to effectively and professionally manage the Commons through a challenging period of unprecedented visitor numbers and omnipresent health risk. With the warmest and sunniest May on record, staff resources were stretched to the limit in managing litter and waste with a five-fold increase in costs just for proper disposal of the waste.

Since the middle of May 2020, there has been a phased return of golf and horse-riding on Wimbledon Common and bowling on Putney Lower Common, all with appropriate social distancing. The car parks across the Commons have now all reopened, with wider car parking bays to help maintain the 2m social distancing, reducing the risk of the virus spreading. All public toilets remain closed at the present time, a factor which needs to be taken into account when visiting the Commons. Pitch sports and organised runs, including the weekly Parkrun, are still not permitted.

Unfortunately, as a result of COVID-19 it will not be possible to hold the Commons Open Day in September this year. All our energies are however being directed towards the celebrations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act in 2021.

### **Annual Open Meeting**

Given the exceptional circumstances arising from COVID-19, WPCC has been considering the arrangements for its Annual Open Meeting at which the charity's Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements are finally examined and settled. In response to a request made in the House of Commons by Mr Stephen Hammond, MP for Wimbledon on 3 June 2020, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy confirmed to Mr Hammond that the Charity Commission would look favourably on charities such as WPCC that are unable to hold their annual meetings in the normal fashion. At its recent meeting, having thoroughly considered all the options, the Board therefore resolved to hold the Annual Open Meeting on the 29 July 2020 at 8:00pm using digital technology.

It is WPCC's intention to publish the approved Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements at least fourteen days before the virtual meeting. In order to foster participation and engagement as best possible, the Conservators encourage anyone with questions on the Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements to please provide these in advance of the Annual Open Meeting. All those wishing to participate in the virtual meeting will need to register in advance via our website from 9 July 2020.

Further details regarding the Annual Open Meeting will be provided in the annual Commons Newsletter, which will be distributed to all residential dwellings in the Levy-paying area in early July and published on the WPCC's website. Posters advertising the meeting will also be displayed around the Commons and notices placed in local newspapers.

### **Shared-Use Pedestrian and Cycling Path**

There are a number of shared-use pedestrian and cycling routes across the Commons and these have become particularly popular during the COVID-19 pandemic with a significant increase in the numbers of cyclists. The shared-use path adjacent to Beverley Brook on Wimbledon Common is in a particularly poor condition and is sometimes impassable during the winter months.

With the support of external funding WPCC is now in a position to install a new gravel surface, similar to that used in the enhancement of Inner Windmill Road. An additional financial contribution has been kindly provided through funds raised for the Friends of Wimbledon and Putney Commons. The works will commence during the summer period and there may be a need for some temporary diversions. This will provide a significant improvement for visitors in this important wildlife corridor.

## **Appointed Conservator - Ministry of Defence**

In May 2020, the first three-year term of the Conservator appointed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) came to an end. The Chairman and Chief Executive requested the MoD re-appoint him for a further three-year term. The current Secretary of State, while recognising that the current MoD-Appointed Conservator had acquitted himself well, has chosen not to re-appoint him for the full three-year term. The Secretary of State has recognised the importance of the link between WPCC and the MoD and as such has decided that the MoD-Appointed Conservator needs to have established links with the MoD. He has however thanked the current MoD-Appointed Conservator for his service and agreed that he may continue in the role until a replacement is appointed. The current MoD Appointed Conservator has therefore agreed to continue to serve the Board until such time as the newly appointed Conservator is able to take on the role, timescales for which remain uncertain given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the MoD's operations.

## **Information Request**

In its May 2020 Media Release, the Board reported that the Information Commissioner's Office had issued a [Decision Notice](#) supporting WPCC's position in relation to a request for information from a Levy-payer under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004. This related to an 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. WPCC was notified on the 9 June 2020 that the complainant has appealed the Information Commissioner's Decision Notice to the First-tier Tribunal.

## **Governance**

WPCC has been a member of the London Borough of Merton Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) since the late 1950s. For the purposes of determining employers' contributions to the LGPS, a full actuarial valuation is carried out every three years. The latest triennial actuarial valuation (TAV) of the LGPS was published in late March 2020 and set out the actuarial position of the LGPS as at 31 March 2019. The valuation confirmed that the fund was in a surplus position, having achieved a funding level of 103%.

In a continuing effort to proactively publish information that is considered to be of interest and relevance to levy-payers and the wider community whenever possible, full details of the valuation have been published and may be found [here](#).

The Board at its June meeting also agreed to publish a Progress Report on Key Initiatives 2020-2023 reviewing work achieved over the past year and setting out the initiatives for 2020-2021. A copy of the report can be downloaded from [here](#).

The [Resolutions](#) of the meeting of the Board of Conservators held on 8 June 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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